

# Famous Artists Course

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**Famous Artists Schools, Inc.**  
Westport, Connecticut



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ALBERT DORNE

Courtesy John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co.

**Composition** is the use of artistic judgment in assembling the various elements of a picture to produce a harmonious whole.



## Composition — Pictorial Design — Space

*COMPOSITION is the combining of forms and space to produce a harmonious whole.*

Until now, your instruction and work have been confined mostly to the understanding and drawing of objects. Making pictures, as distinguished from drawing objects, is the combining of these objects with other picture elements to produce a pictorial relationship. Basically, a picture is a series of relationships between objects and the space around them — this is composition. Some pictures appear simple, some complex. Compare this with a simple tune played by a single instrument and a symphony played by a hundred piece orchestra. Both can be good but they have each been written with a different idea in mind and each has its own group of relationships.

As applied to the art of drawing, painting or any other form of pictorial interpretation, composition means the orderly distribution and placing of forms, shapes and space to create, in a given area and in a logical orderly manner, a picture which, according to time and certain rules, has proven satisfactory. It is not the thoughtless throwing together of miscellaneous objects, or the filling up of a background with unimportant matter. But, speaking specifically, it is the art of assembling the various elements you want in the picture and, through applying artistic judgement, placing them harmoniously within a given area — to produce a perfect and completely unified picture.

A well-composed picture will afford a satisfied sense of impact and beauty to the average person although he may not know by what method this satisfaction has been produced. The skilled artist, on the other hand, must know the principles and method of execution by which the pictorial arrangement was so satisfactorily rendered.

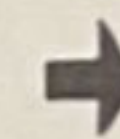
It is necessary to learn to use certain known and proven rules — to compose a picture in which you can control an observer's interest as well as making him understand the idea you are trying to portray. A great deal has been said and written on the subject of composition, yet not enough has been said about its first principles, and without a complete understanding of these fundamental principles, we have no set of standards upon which to judge the merit or quality of a picture.

The object of this lesson is to clearly point out and teach you the fundamental principles of composition — how to successfully arrange the elements of design, space and objects and how to give beauty to pictures that would otherwise be uninteresting and disorganized.

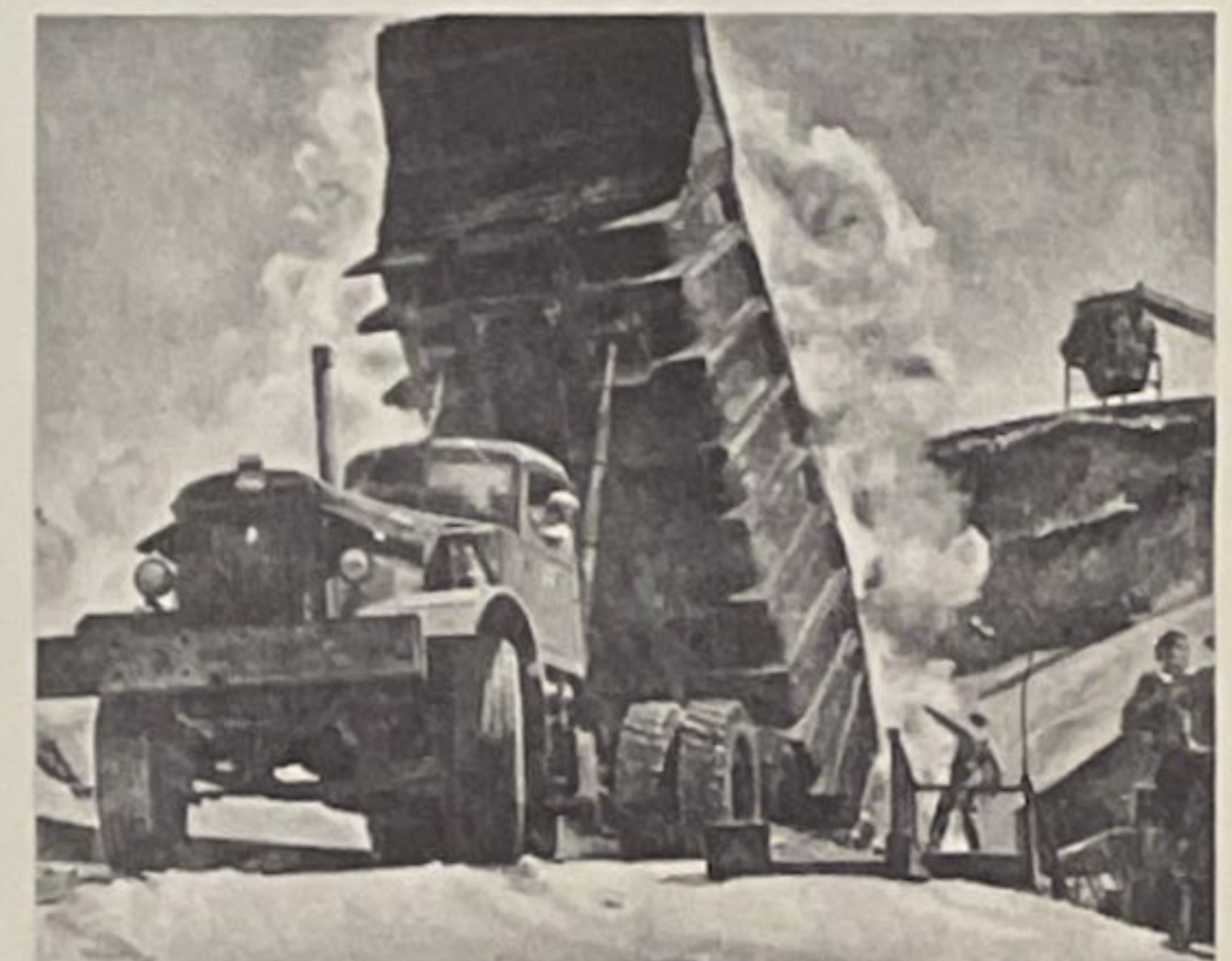
There are many correct ways of composing a picture and in your approach to your work, you should always be alive to every possibility of expression.

*PICTORIAL DESIGN is the creative control of forms and space to increase the effectiveness of subject matter.*

Design is the co-ordination of all compositional elements that make up the picture. Pictorial design in composition is a vital factor in illustration. One of the necessities of an illustration is that it must be noticed. The illustration must attract the attention



A fine example of pictorial design is this picture for a truck advertisement by Peter Helck.



Courtesy of Mack Trucks





Here are the physical forms that will make a picture.



They are composed and designed like this while . . .



the space around and between them — the negative form — is thoughtfully designed like this.

of the public for which it is intended. Since design offers limitless opportunities for creating pictorial effects — those opportunities must be explored to the utmost.

Usually, when two or more forms are of the same shape, they should be of different size — if they are the same size, they should be of different shape; in either case, they can be of a different tone or color. Repetition of shapes and forms should never become monotonous. Its purpose is to add strength or to accentuate an idea. A change of texture will frequently avoid monotony when forms are similar. Make your forms appear strong rather than brittle — unless the latter effect is desired. Your picture should be so designed that the eye travels freely from point to point. It should never become trapped in some corner where things come to a stop. Objects in a design must not appear to float in space, unless, of course, this is the deliberate purpose of the design. Think of your picture as having a base, since objects and forms actually do require something on which to rest. Heavier forms are better at the bottom, otherwise your picture may appear topheavy. Frequently you will find that a dark color or value at the bottom provides stability. If the forms in your design are large, simple shapes, try to overlap them here and there. If such important forms are disconnected, your picture is likely to “fall apart.”

Pictorial design is the selection and establishment of order, rhythm and intelligent balance in your planning. The most fundamental advice we can give you in this, your introduction to composition, is that you must always have a definite theme and direction to your subject matter. Your picture must have this initial design. Without some such direction, there is no intelligent artistic basis for your composition.

*SPACE is negative form in relation to positive form in the picture area.*

Before getting along with your instruction, it is important that you become conscious of space. Space is negative and fills in those parts of a picture that the objects do not occupy. By doing this, it determines the shapes of these objects. Its importance, therefore, becomes quite obvious. It should be considered as negative form, whereas objects are considered as positive form. It is the most fluid of all the parts of a picture. It gives dimension, design and unity — so it is important for you to know how to control and use it. Space is used in two ways — the space between objects on a flat surface in two dimensions — and the illusion of space in depth.

Just as the shapes and forms in your picture are important, so are the spaces *between* these shapes and forms. Space can become disturbing and ugly if it is not planned at the same time the forms are planned and placed — a picture should never seem to have “holes” in it. If there are crowded areas in your picture, you can often balance them effectively with other simple or vacant areas. Strive for balance in every element of your picture.

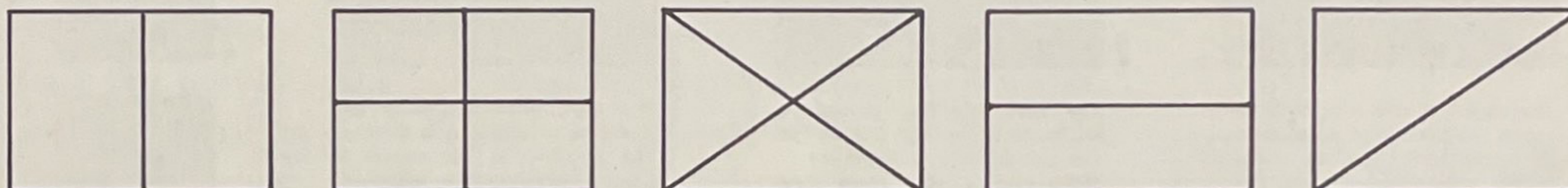
Within a Composition, forms and space must be designed to have balance, rhythm, unity, harmony and interest.



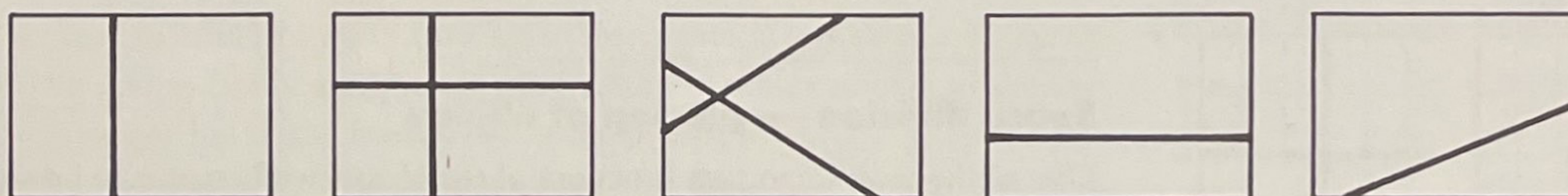
### Distribution of areas in balance

While balance is easily obtained in symmetrical arrangement, it will establish a static state of repose. In pictorial composition when movement is desired, balance must be accomplished by arrangement of areas that are not symmetrical. Regardless of its proportions and the limits of its boundaries, a rectangle, for example, presents to the artist possibilities for an infinite variety of arrangements in the division of space and areas.

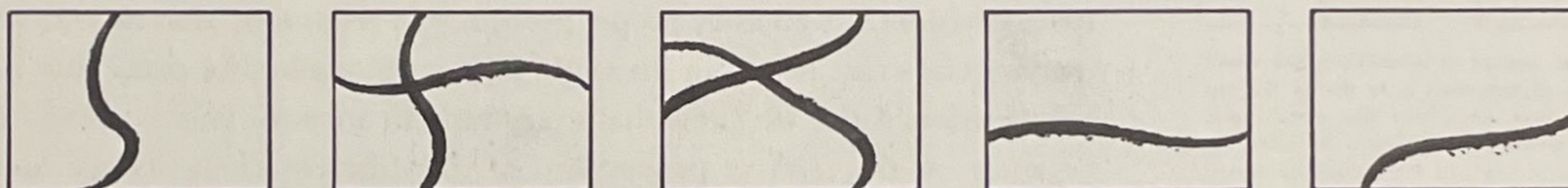
Let us begin with simple distribution of space.



1 The equal distribution of space has the monotony of hitting the same note on a piano, its interest is equally divided, much like repeating your name without changing your voice — it has a rather mechanical appearance.



2 Now we have divided the space more unequally. The areas are no longer the same, it is more like changing your voice and adding a few words — or some extra notes to the original note on the piano. Observe that we have not changed the lines, only their position on the picture space.



3 We now take the same lines as above and give them movement. The areas now begin to intrigue the imagination — this is dividing space as design. Don't you find this group more interesting than the first two?



4 Now we have added tone to the different areas, balancing the weight of interest in each case with an added form. A small element of great interest will balance much larger elements of lesser interest.

### Mechanical balance — Harmony in optical balance

Balance can be achieved by arrangement of areas that are not symmetrical, *but in harmony*. Whenever things have common characteristics which are distinctly noticeable, they are in harmony. We will try to make the principles of Harmony in Balance easily understood, by the adjoining diagrams divided by lines into pleasing and unpleasing space division. In diagram 1, we made a division on the rectangle by drawing a line through the center. Observe that the two areas are now of equal importance; there is a sameness and uniformity in the two that gives symmetry but not variety. The division of diagram 2 is also annoying to the eye, the contrast in size between the two areas is so great that the smaller area gives the effect of being cut away. In diagram 3, we do not feel the lack of relationship as we did in diagram 2 — or the sameness of diagram 1 — but rather the division of an area in which the eye can perceive a harmonious relation which gives a sense of harmony and satisfaction.

There are many reasons why a sense of visual comfort exists in the division of space in number 3. We will explain the most important ones as we proceed.



1  
Equal division of space results in visual boredom.

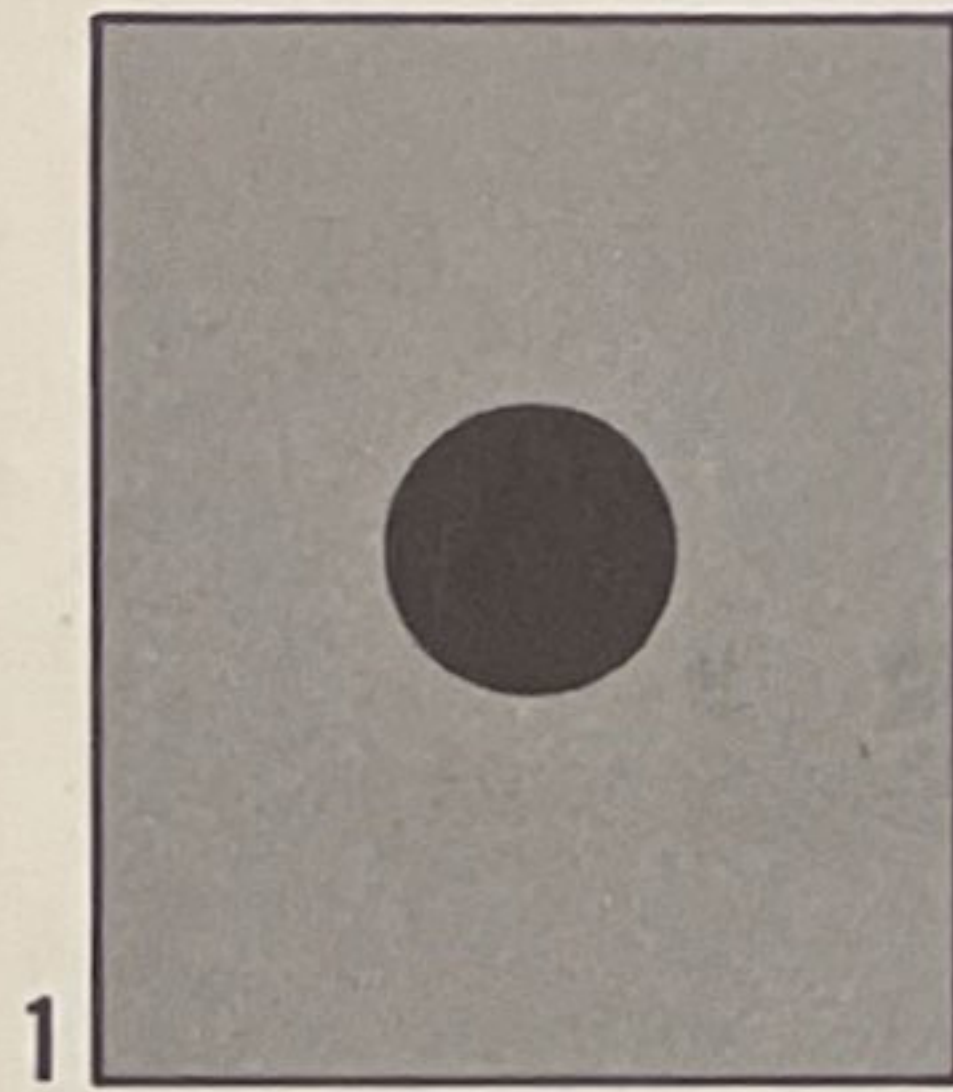


2  
Spaces unrelated because of too great a contrast in area.

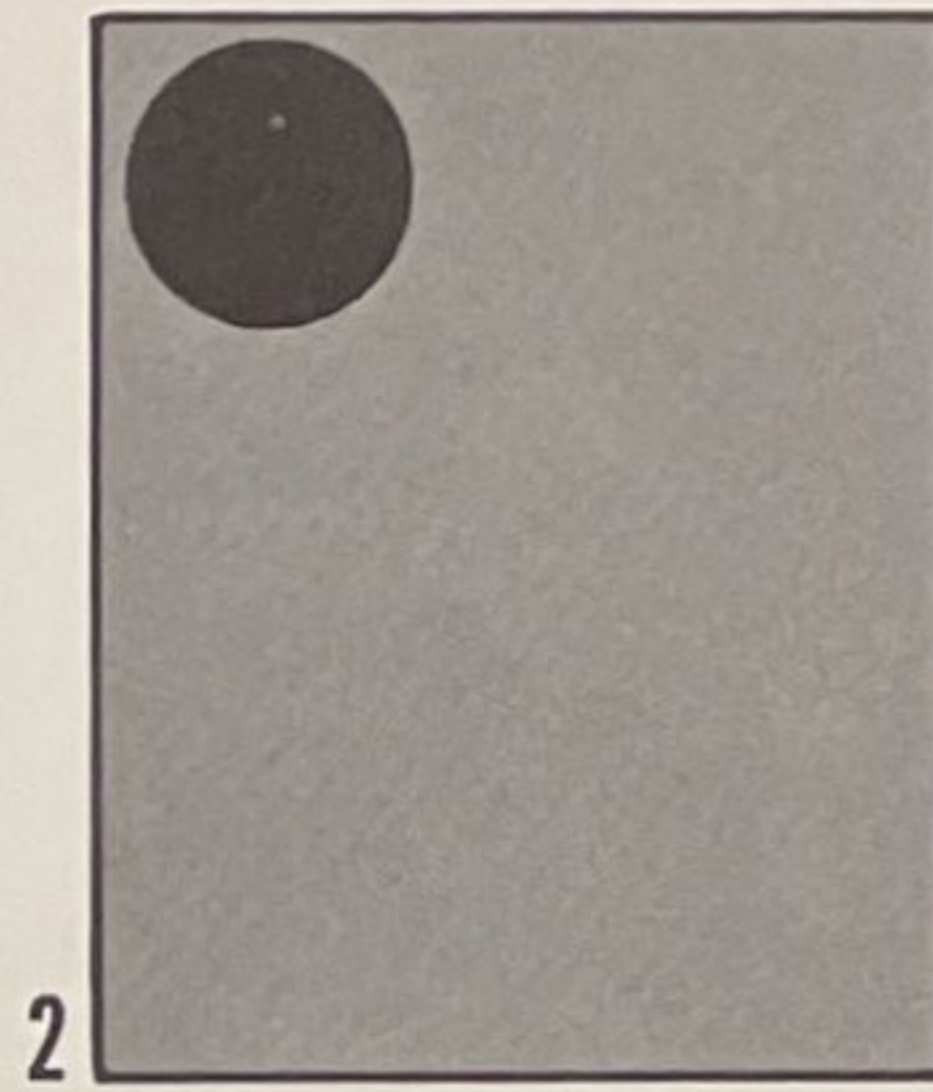


3  
Near enough in space areas to be pleasantly related.

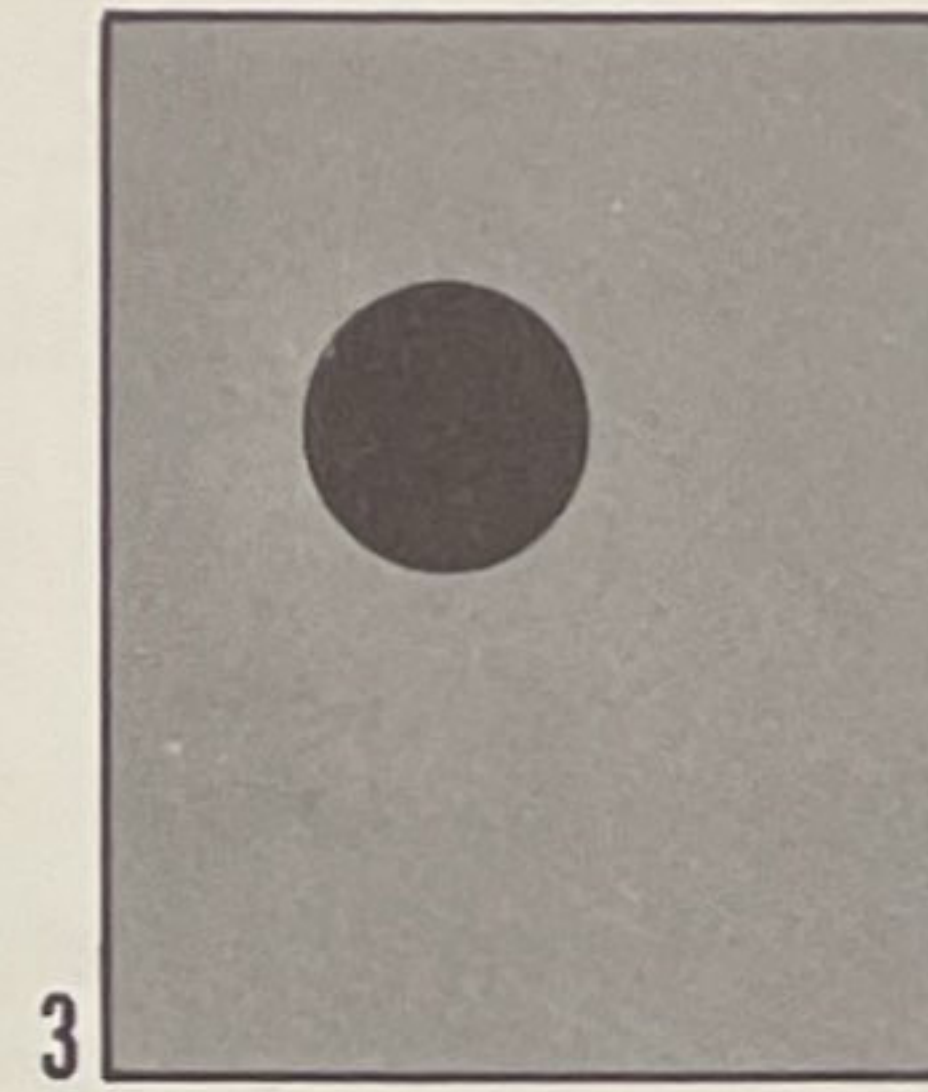




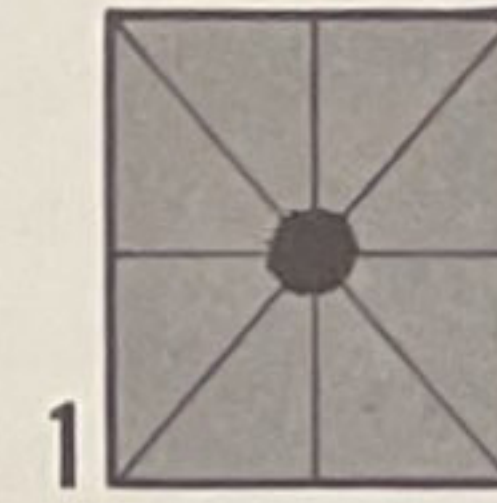
1 The object or spot placed in the center causes the eye to move back and forth from the object to the sides, top, bottom and corners equally. This equal space division around the spot soon becomes monotonous.



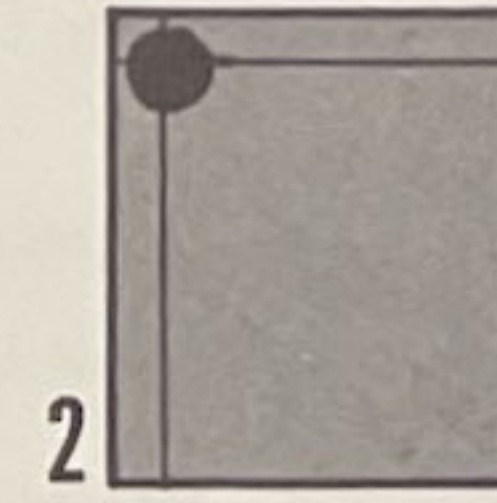
2 The spot extremely placed so as to lead the eye to one of the corners has a tendency to divide the picture space into areas that have no pleasing relation to each other or to the whole area.



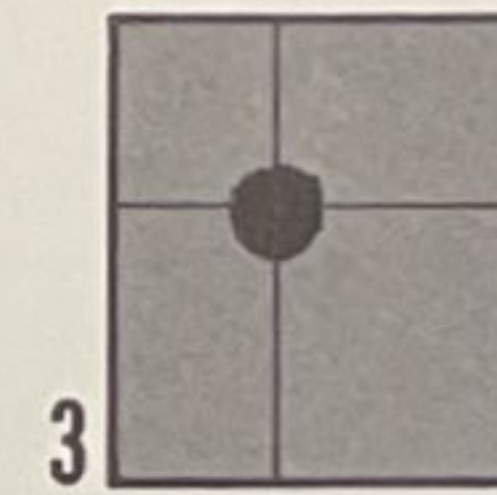
3 The spot, when placed in this position, is satisfying to the eye. The location of the object is good anywhere within the frame lines provided it is not in the center of the picture space or too near the frame lines.



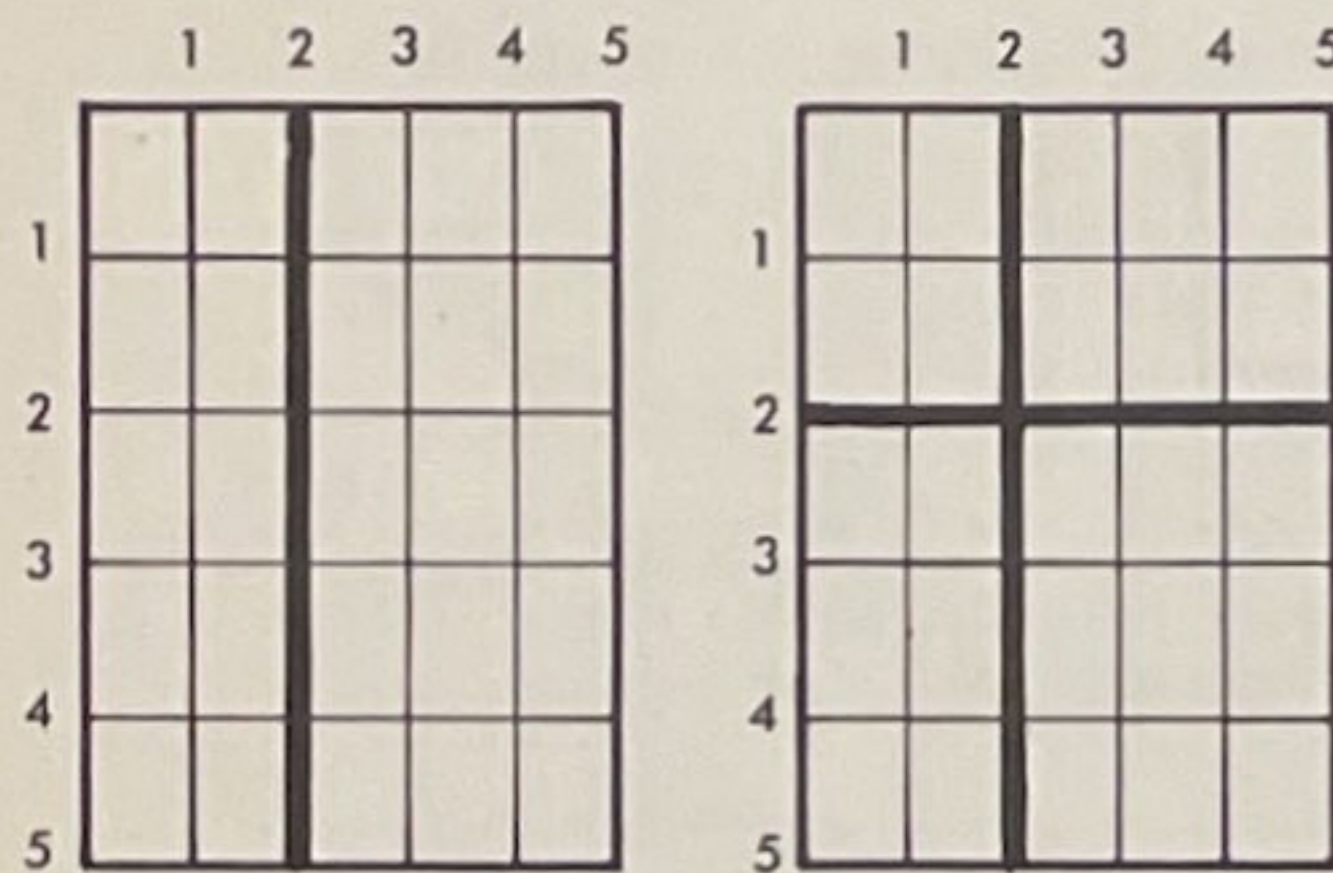
1 The center is undesirable for the location of the main element of the picture.



2 A spot here produces an emptiness in the remainder of the picture area.



3 This spot was not placed by guesswork or feeling—but by a definite knowledge of measure.



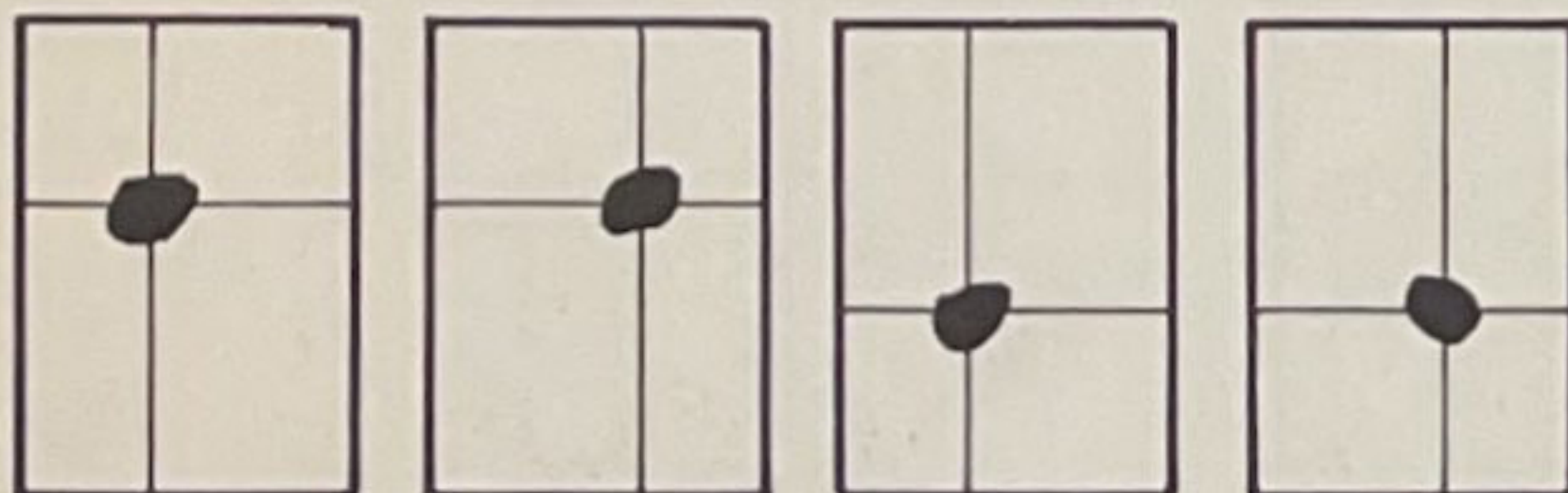
The simplest method of establishing the visual center of a picture area is to divide the top and side frame lines into five equal parts and then divide the picture area into any combination of two and three parts as shown.

### Space division — placing of objects

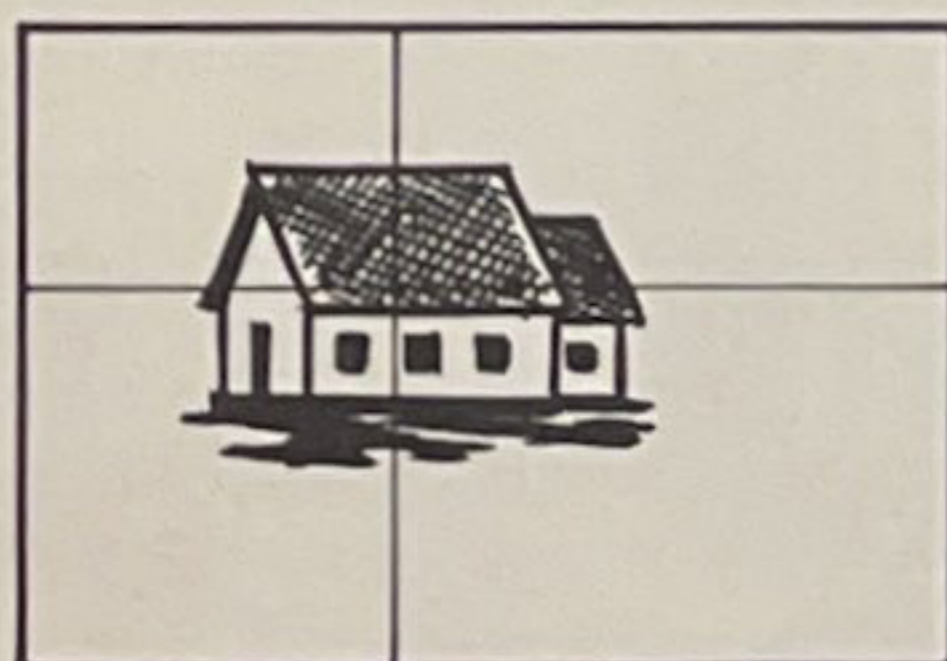
One of the most important functions of the commercial artist is to be able to present, in a beautiful manner, an object which may have no beauty or personality in itself. This can be accomplished best by following the laws of balance and proportion in space division, as well as by proper grouping in relation to that object. Thus, the good commercial artist needs, in his work, a practical method of procedure in creating his composition. Since we know that everything in art must be related and that harmony depends on the relative proportions of the different elements, we must have some means of judgement and measure in order to place our most important object correctly in the picture space.

Given a single object to use as a major element in a composition, we must give the same thought to its placement as though we were given several objects. *The harmonious placement of this single object within the frame lines must be your first consideration.* Actually it is more difficult to develop a good composition from one object than it is when you have several to work with.

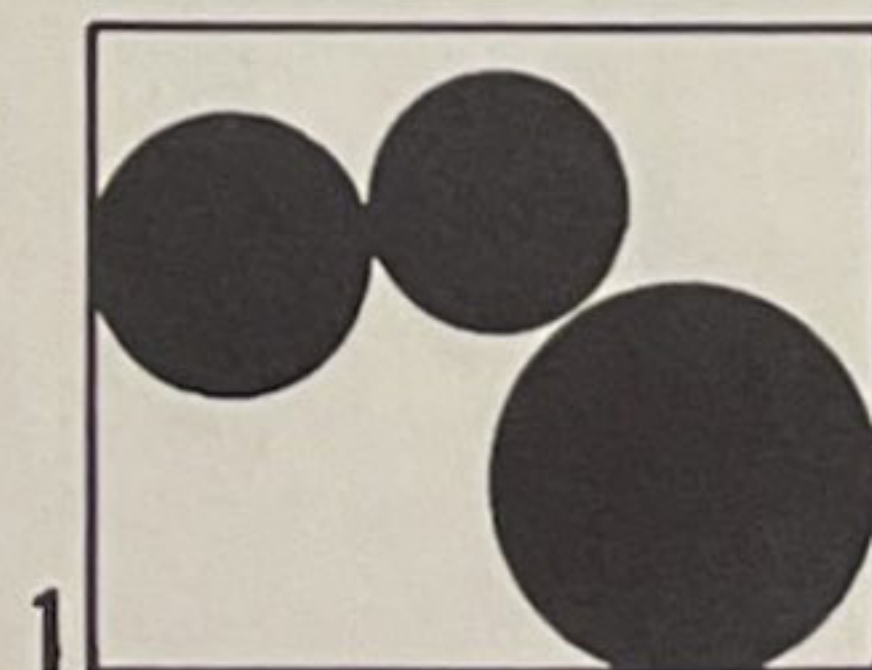
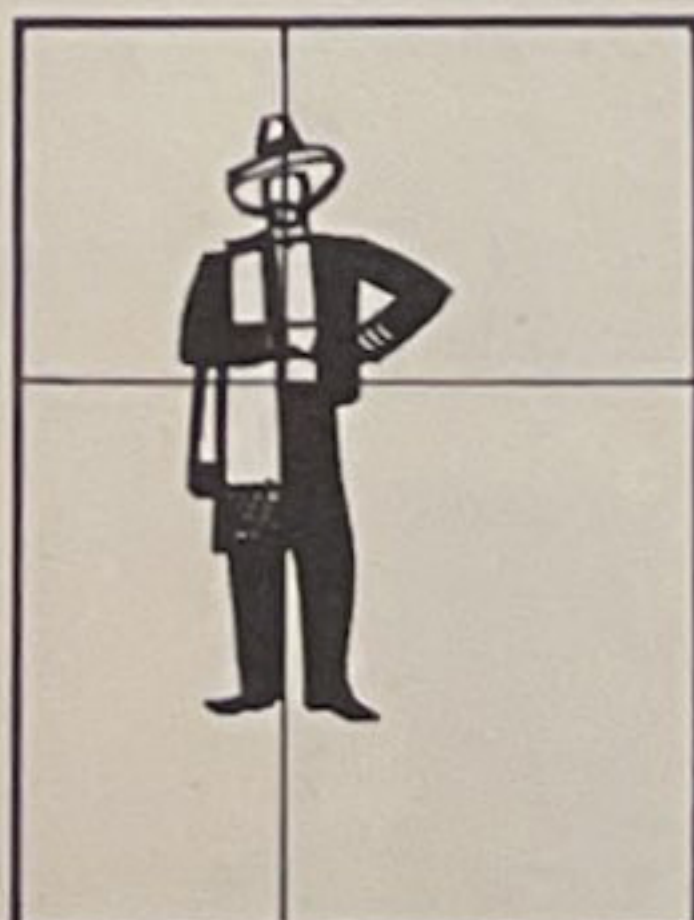
To place a single object correctly within a given space in harmonious relation to that space, we first draw a rectangle and divide the top and side of the frame lines into five equal parts as shown. The intersection of any of the sets of heavily marked hori-



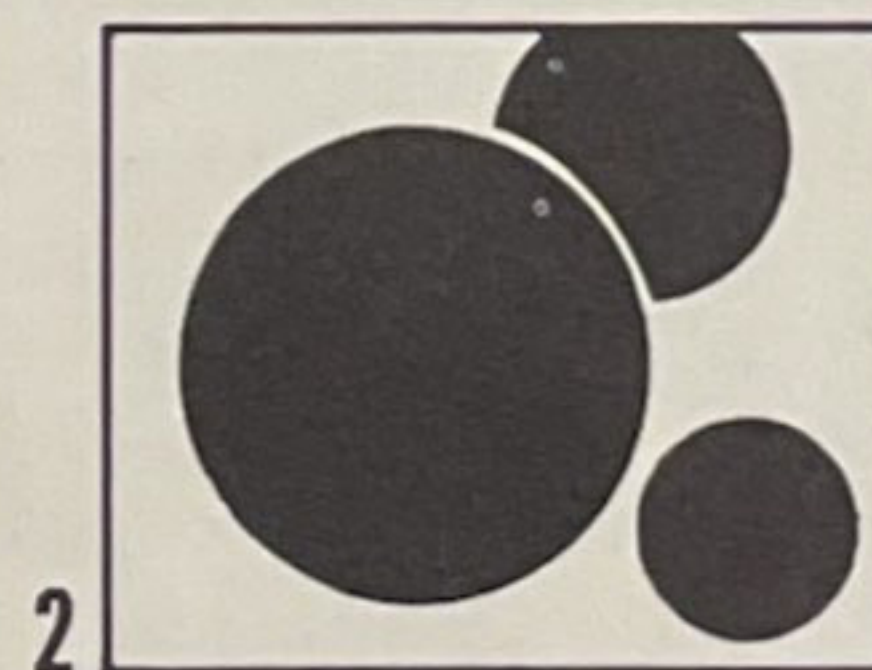
The intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines locates a spot in the area which we term the "Visual Center."



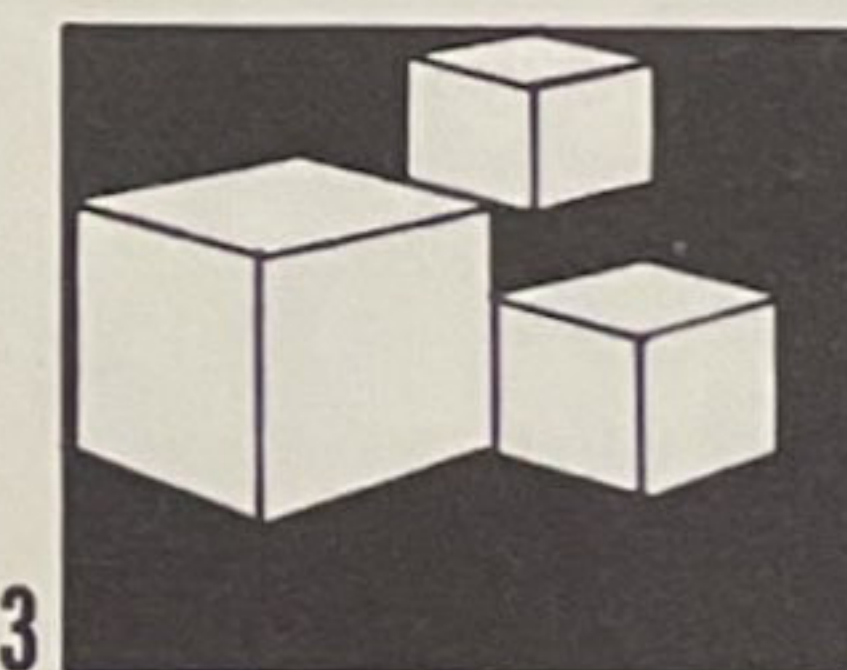
Any object may be counted on to draw added interest through placement in or near the visual center. So placed, an object needs very little emphasis to make it effective.



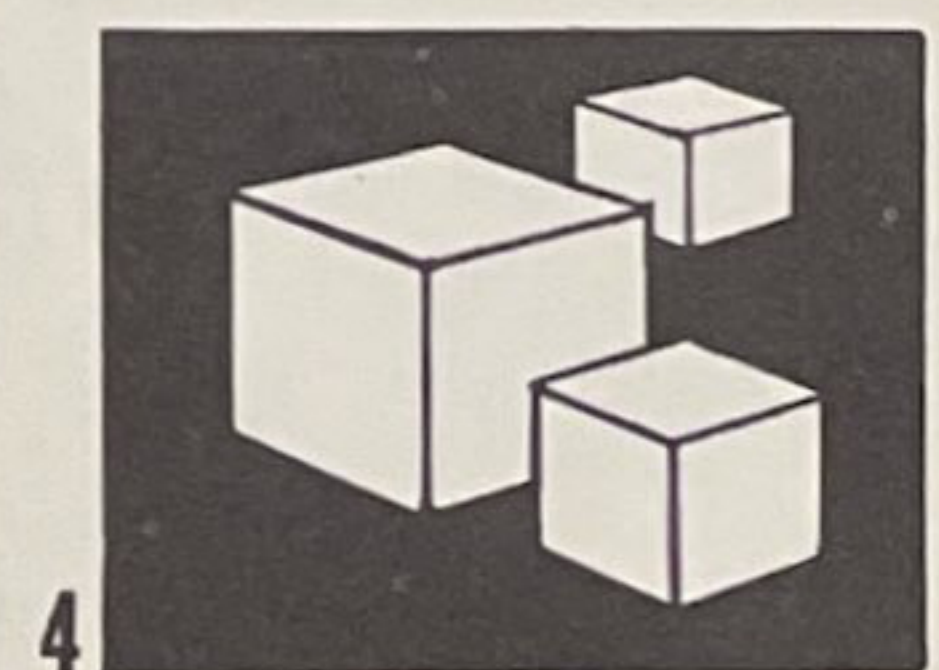
1 **Wrong.** There is a strange awkwardness when a picture has no visual center and when objects just touch each other.



2 **Right.** We have put them together pleasingly by placing the largest circle at the visual center and overlapping one of the circles.



3 **Wrong.** The cubes are disturbing because they seem to just touch each other—no visual center is apparent and this creates confusion.



4 **Right.** Moving the largest cube to the visual center and overlapping the other two cubes unifies the elements harmoniously.



zontal and vertical line combinations drawn from the numbered divisions will give you what is known as the aesthetic center of the picture area. Having found this aesthetic center, you have established a starting point within the working area. Remember that there is more than one position in the picture area for the placement of the object, for the rectangle can be used as we have divided it, showing eight different placements, with the rectangle lying on its side or end.

It can be readily seen from the diagrams that any one of these aesthetic points can be utilized, depending on which one your subject matter would suggest. However, it must be remembered that only one of these points should be used in a pictorial arrangement for the placement of your principal object. It can be seen, through these diagrams, that we have established a ratio of about two to three in the picture area. When placing the object at the selected aesthetic center of the area, this same ratio should be kept in mind. In other words, the object should not be placed exactly over the aesthetic center, but in a relation to the aesthetic center similar to the one that the aesthetic center has to the frame lines of the picture.

The reason for locating the visual centers for you on these diagrams, is that they establish points in the picture area which have a proven magnetic influence on our sense of vision that is pleasing and restful — and give our aesthetic sense real satisfaction.



**Wrong.** Objects should never be bunched in one area of the picture space — don't cut your picture in two.



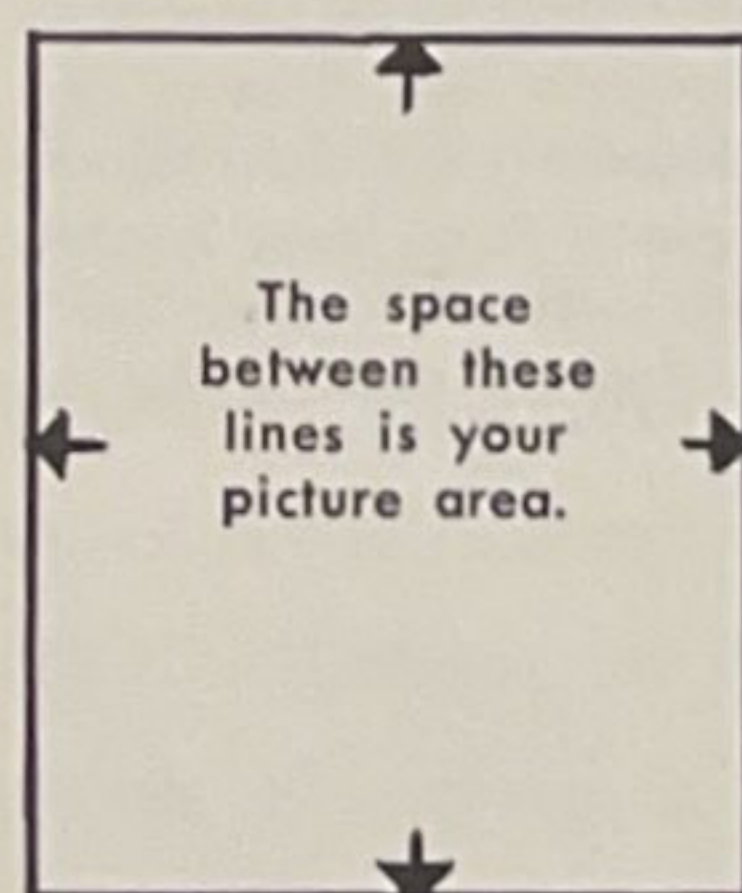
**Right.** Cutting off part of the bowl of fruit and overlapping the picture with the bottle gives a harmonious effect.



**Wrong.** When more than one object is shown in a picture, there is no need to show all of each object.



**Right.** Part of an object, such as this tree, may be out of the picture — this sometimes serves as a useful "lead in" to the picture.



1



The figure has been placed in the exact center — the space around the figure is evenly divided.

2



The line of the ground across the center divides the picture into four equal areas. This creates monotony.

3



The two buildings now seem crowded and touch the figure and frame lines at awkward points.

4



The line of the mountains seems to rest on the man's head. There is something unsatisfying about this picture.

Using exactly the same elements, we show the wrong and right way of putting them together to create a harmonious balance.



Starting now with the figure at the visual center of the picture space, more variety is present in the working area.



The ground line is now considerably below center. It distributes the space areas more effectively — the man is more prominent.



We now run the two buildings together and behind the figure, there is no awkward touching of contact points.



The lines of the mountains, lower than and behind the man, now give a feeling of depth and balance. This is a more satisfying picture.





The eye may be led from one part of a picture to another part in a natural easy way. Note how positive the shift of interest is back into the second picture.



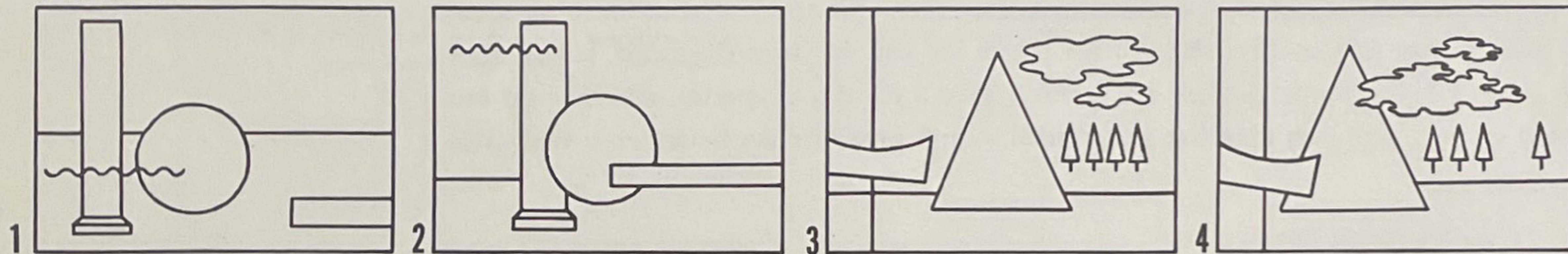
When all the objects are drawn entirely within the frame lines, monotony may develop. But when parts of these are drawn to appear extending beyond the frame lines or behind one another, we have variety in the composition.

### Movement and lapping

Movement means that the eye can be directed or led from one part to another part of a picture — an advertising design should do this in a natural, easy way. For example, place some figures in a picture walking toward another room apparently outside the frame line — your interest is immediately centered on the frame line and on the other room, you feel that the picture space will soon be empty and uninteresting. Now reverse the action and have the figures walking into the picture and we have a startling shift of interest back into the picture space which now seems to become interesting again.

We have called your attention to movement here, because it is so closely associated with lapping, or “cut offs,” which add variety to a composition. By lapping we mean the placing of one object upon or in front of another — or having an object cut off by the frame lines so they will partially cover that object. Lapping of objects adds variety and depth to a composition and also suggests something beyond the frame lines. This often makes the picture space appear larger.

JOHN ATHERTON



In these four diagrams I have shown how it is possible to overlap some of the forms in a composition to avoid a scattered or broken up appearance in the design. Figure 1 shows a group of lines and forms in a scattered arrangement. It also has what might be a horizon line which comes near the center. You can easily recognize the weaknesses apparent in this composition. Notice how much more coherent the design becomes in Figure 2 by a simple juxtaposition of forms. The column-like form has been widened a little to give more variety with the horizontal shape. The circle, probably the most important element of the design, has been moved nearer the middle of the picture as a center of interest. The horizon line has been lowered and is continued by the horizontal form. You will find this type of design

much more suitable for your commercial assignments than one which lacks such cohesion. Figure 3 presents another example of scattered design. In Figure 4 the forms have been changed very little in shape or size, but they have been overlapped in places. The cloud-like shape was made more irregular in outline to contrast with the simplicity of the other forms. The little triangular trees were broken up into a more successful grouping — three and one instead of four. These illustrations must be recognized as only chart-like suggestions for solving problems which may occur in some of your work. They illustrate how, by slight alterations, you can often achieve a more successful structure in composition.

### Points of contact

Contact points or tangents occur where a straight or curved line touches or “runs into” another line. This applies as well to the close union or junction of objects or areas. Contact points of lines or areas such as these cause the eye to be attracted to these contact points instead of to the object itself. Elements in a composition are too often placed in a picture without regard for this principle and instead of holding the attention to the message the picture has to convey, these tangents divert and distract the eye. All lines leading up to one center of interest with one purpose of focusing attention are good — but lines causing tangents which focus on other centers in the same composition must be avoided.

#### Unrelated lines

When two or more lines in a composition join to form a longer line, the eye is bound to follow this longer line whose parts are formed by the edges of unrelated objects. Never place objects or lines in the background so that their lines join other lines in an object or figure. However, you can arrange these lines successfully if you separate them enough to avoid the undesired line effect.



#### Picture corners

The corners of your picture, due to the juncture of the frame lines, are strong and always attract attention. Therefore, it is always good to terminate lines leading toward a corner at some distance away from it. Cutting objects in half should always be avoided but, as we stated before, lapping of objects at quarters, thirds or fifths adds variety and gives greater interest to your composition.



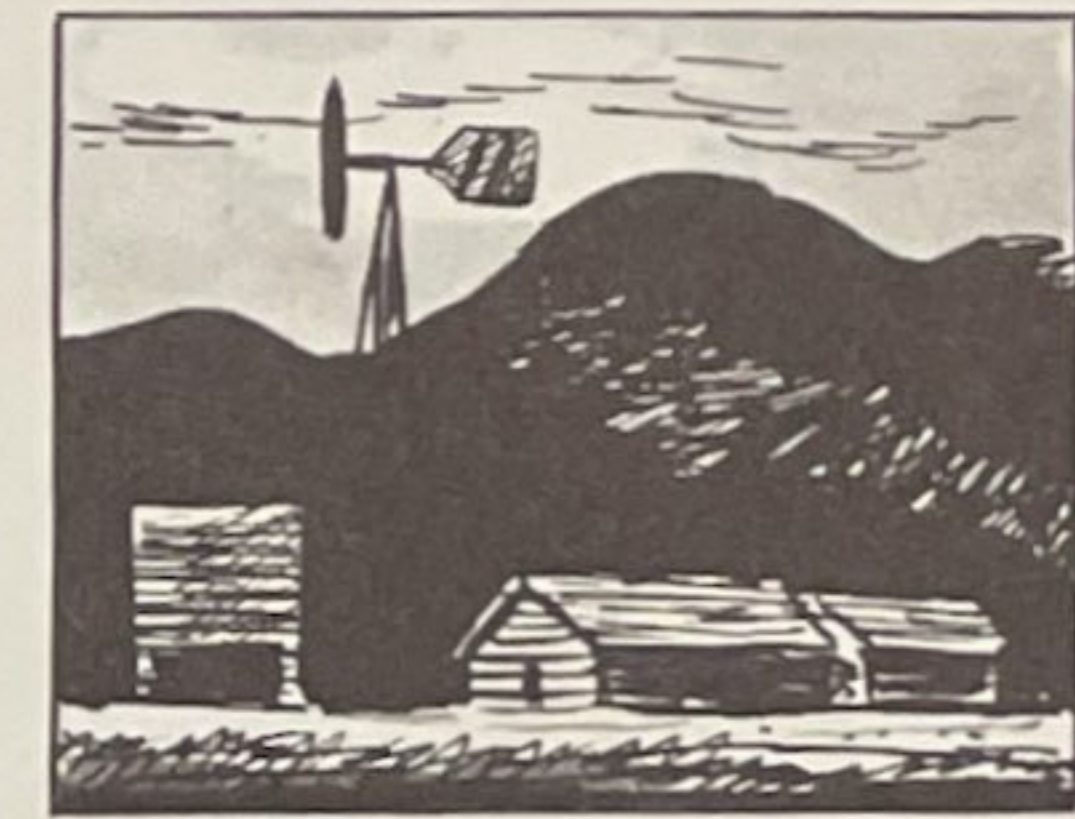
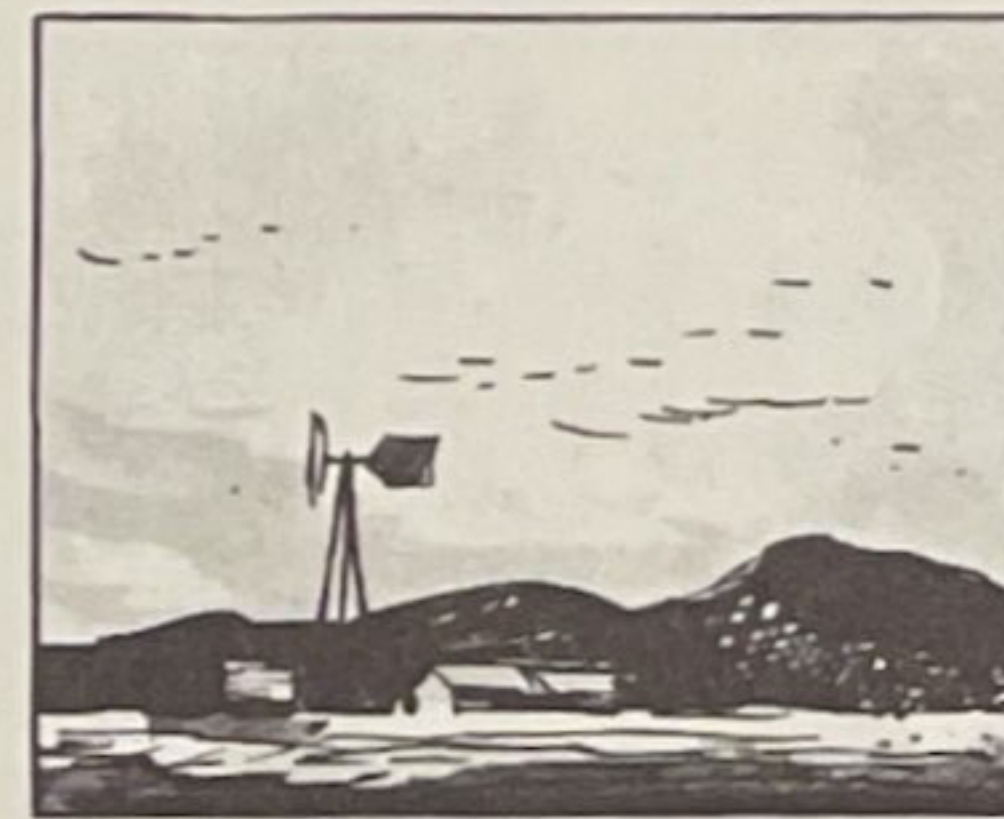


### Space in relation to objects

Just as the shapes and forms in a picture are important, so is the relationship of space to these objects. Space is used in two ways, and it is important that you know its value and how to use it. First, it is used to show distance *between* objects on a flat surface in two dimensions and second, it is used to create an illusion of *depth*. Its importance is quite obvious. You cannot, for example, take many liberties when drawing a piano, but you can do many things with the space around the piano to create the illusion of depth.



Within a given picture area you may have big people or little people — you can have a small landscape with a big sky or a large landscape and a small sky — this is your creative choice. Either point of view is good,



depending of course on the intelligent and proper balance of all the elements in relation to the space.

### Emphasis

In appealing to the observer of a picture with a specific story, it is necessary to emphasize some particular element in your composition, so that the eye is forced or led to it. The principle of emphasis is one of the most important phases involved in the study of pictorial composition, because it is the unifying idea in all picture making. This is especially so in advertising pictures where it is necessary to secure attention for a product. If there are two or more equally dominant elements in a picture, they are bound to detract from each other and divide the observer's interest. Only one dominant element or center of interest is desirable or necessary in a composition, and all other elements should be arranged and placed to give direction and strength to that principal element — not detract from it. It is in this way that we guide or force the eye of the observer to the object or area that we wish to hold his interest. Of considerable consequence in achieving this emphasis is the arrangement of lines and design so that they also help to lead the eye through the composition to the center of interest. The question of balance, the placement of elements, etc. are secondary to this main purpose. It is only by remembering this that emphasis and unity can be successfully obtained.



AL PARKER

Courtesy Ladies' Home Journal

Not the least in importance, is the arrangement of lines so that they lead one through the composition to the center of interest as illustrated by this picture.



Silhouetted against the background of the sky, the figures outside the window, though small, are the most strongly emphasized.

FRED LUDEKENS



ALBERT DORNE

Although surrounded by figures and other elements, the bowl gets immediate emphasis — because of the attention of the people and the silhouette of the bowl itself.

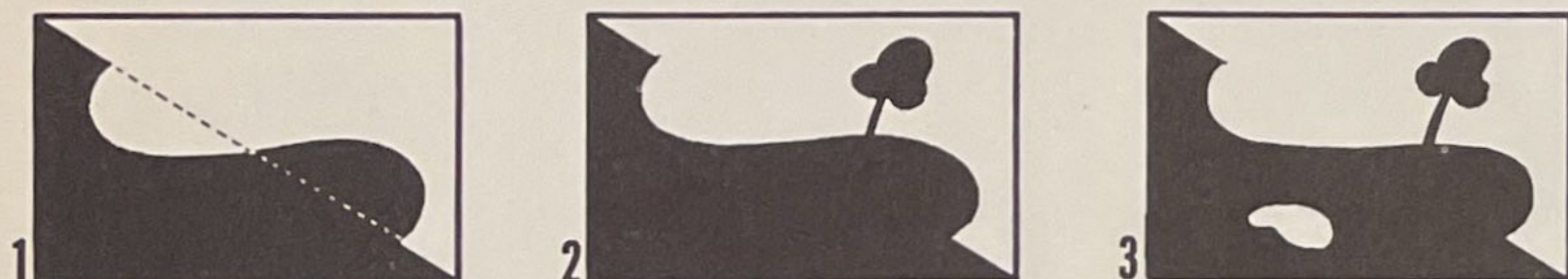


A light in a window at night in the country is a good example of emphasis.

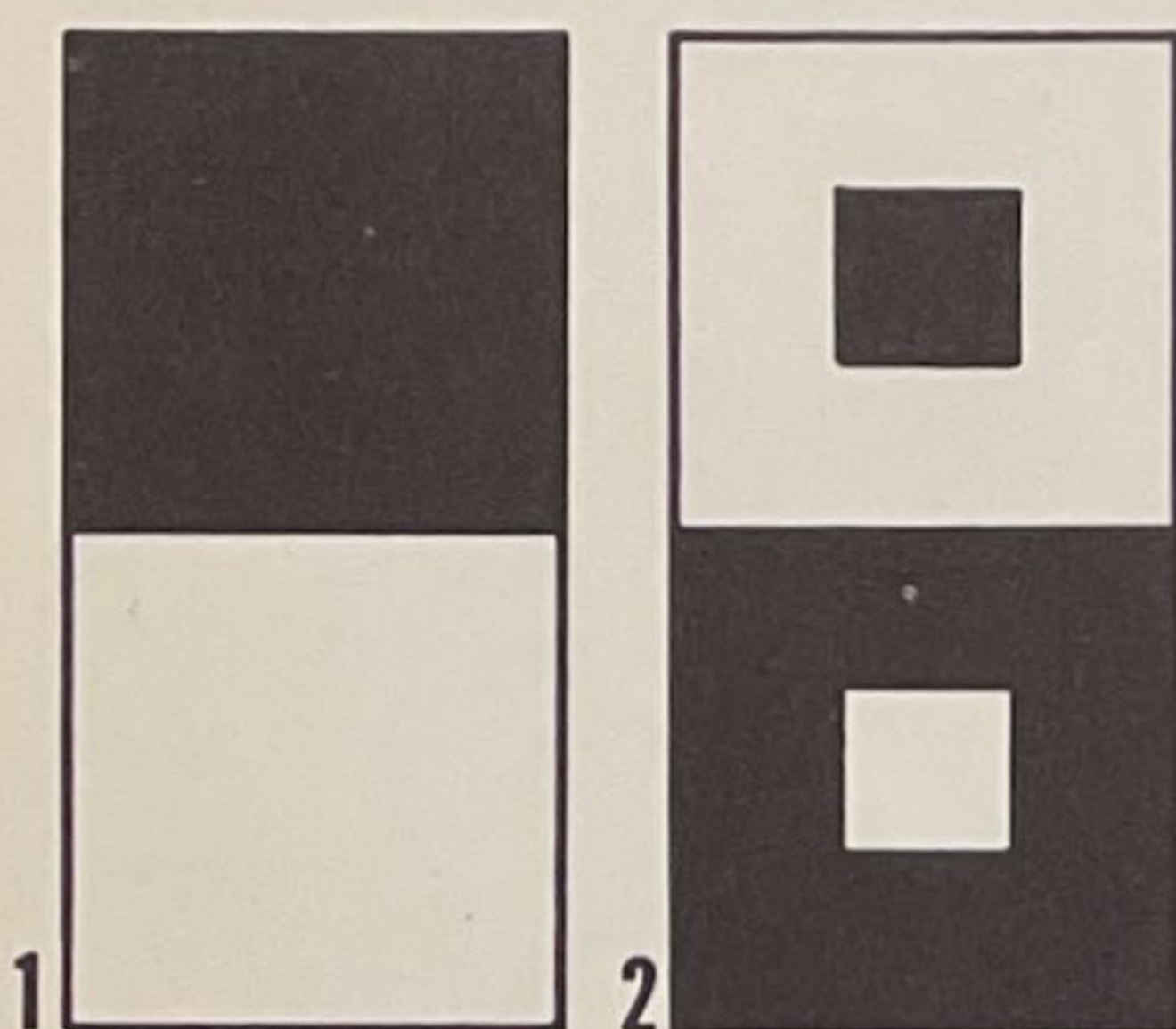


## Composition and pictorial design

Famous Artists Schools, Inc.



Tone balance can be made quite clear if you analyze the above pictures. By dividing No. 1 diagonally, we have cut the picture area in two—the dark and the light areas break into each other equally, creating an equal but uninteresting pattern and balance. In No. 2, by adding a small spot of black over the light area, we have added interest to the whole design. In No. 3, we have repeated this device by adding a small white spot on the black area. By doing this, a pleasing sense of balance has been achieved. Note now how the black spot acts as a counterweight for the large black area while the small white spot does the same for the large white area. By repeating a tone in the opposite half of a picture, the general tonal effect is balanced.



The diagrams above are equal in light and dark areas. This puts them in balance. However, there is this unusual quality connected with these light and dark areas: in the upper half of Diagram 2, the black area on the white ground seems to hold the eye to the surface, while the dark area around the white square acts as a frame and the eye seems to look through this opening. The fact that a white area on a dark ground and a dark area on white ground attract the eye, becomes a very important factor, not only in composition—but also in any effort to attract attention to a specific area.

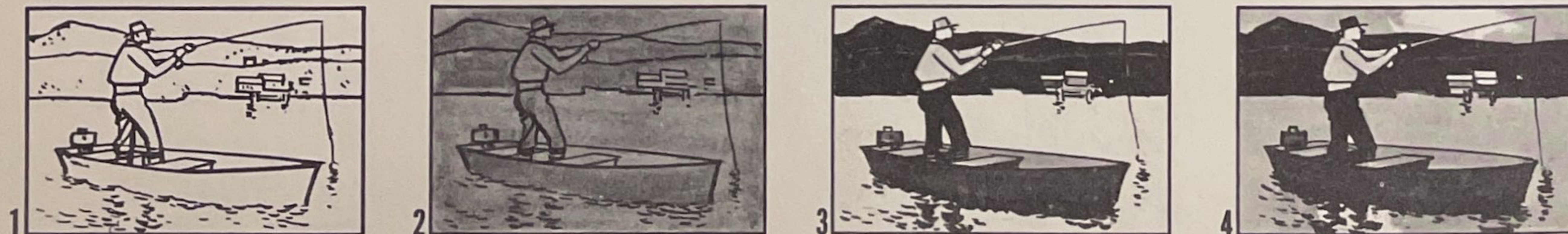
### The distribution of tones and areas in balance

The degree of values from white to black is known as *tone*. Objects in nature are not seen merely in outline; they appear in various tones or colors. To truly represent an object, we must interpret it in these relative tones. We have, until now, worked on the arrangement of objects and space. We must now consider the arrangement of tones and values which enter into every composition problem. When we consider the value of an object or area, we mean how dark or light it is in relation to other things.

In regard to tone balance, what an area in a picture lacks in size may be supplied by sufficient tone contrast. For example, the smaller the darkest area is, the darker the tone should be. Your composition becomes much more interesting and pleasing when you use tones instead of just lines, though of course your composition must be intelligently composed with lines before you can begin to fill in the areas and tones in proper balance. Tones act as steps between the strong contrasting intervals of white and black and they weave the elements of your composition into a unified whole.

Balance in art is not the result of exact measurement, but of judgement and feeling. This principle of balance applies to the arrangement of tones as well as to objects. An experienced artist will balance a large mass of tone on one side of a picture by a smaller but similar mass of the same tone on the other side — this acts as a sort of counterweight and satisfies a sense of balance in the observer.

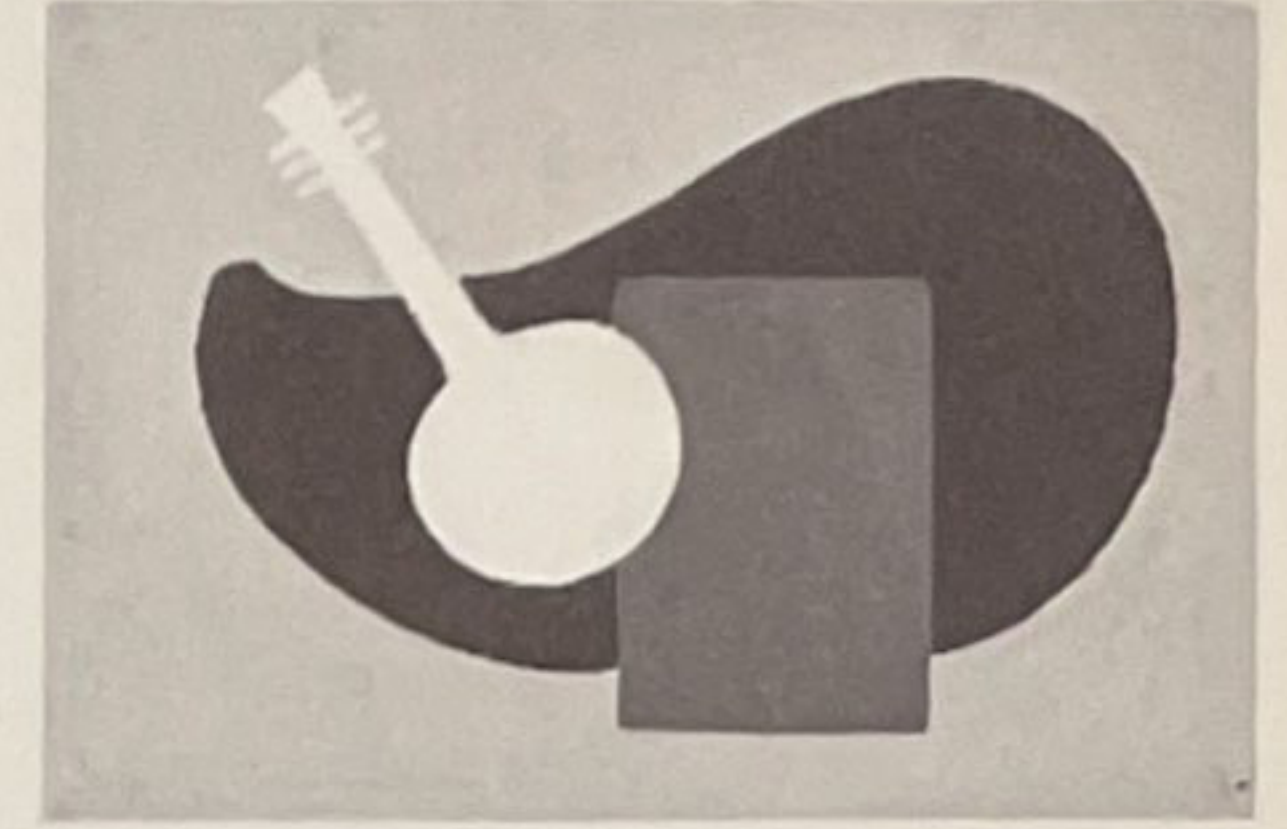
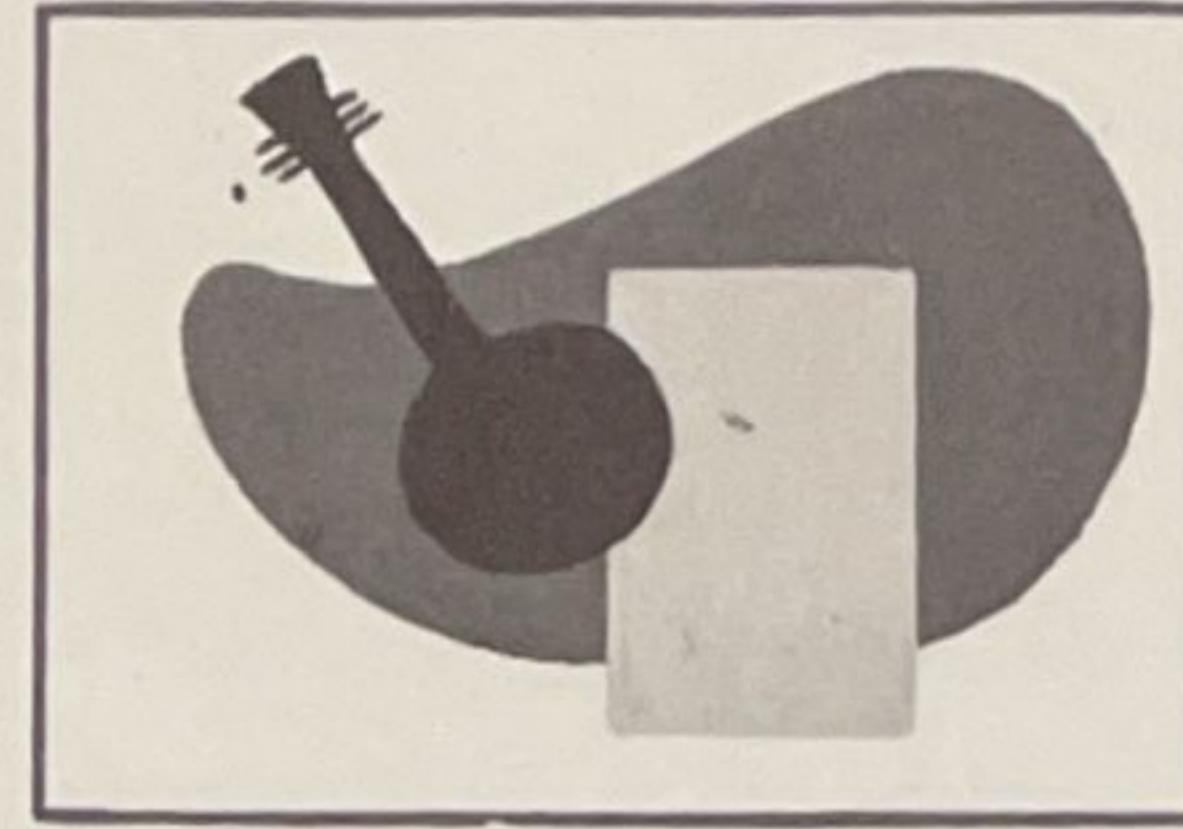
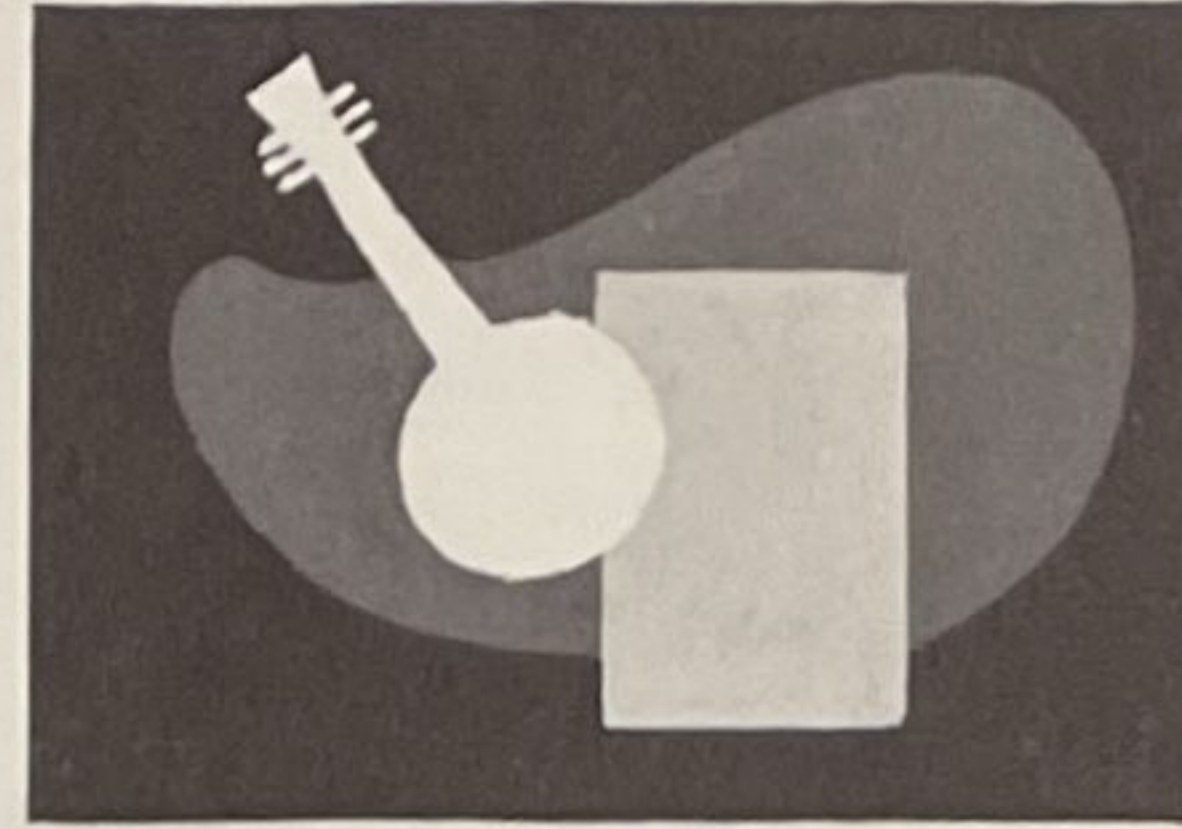
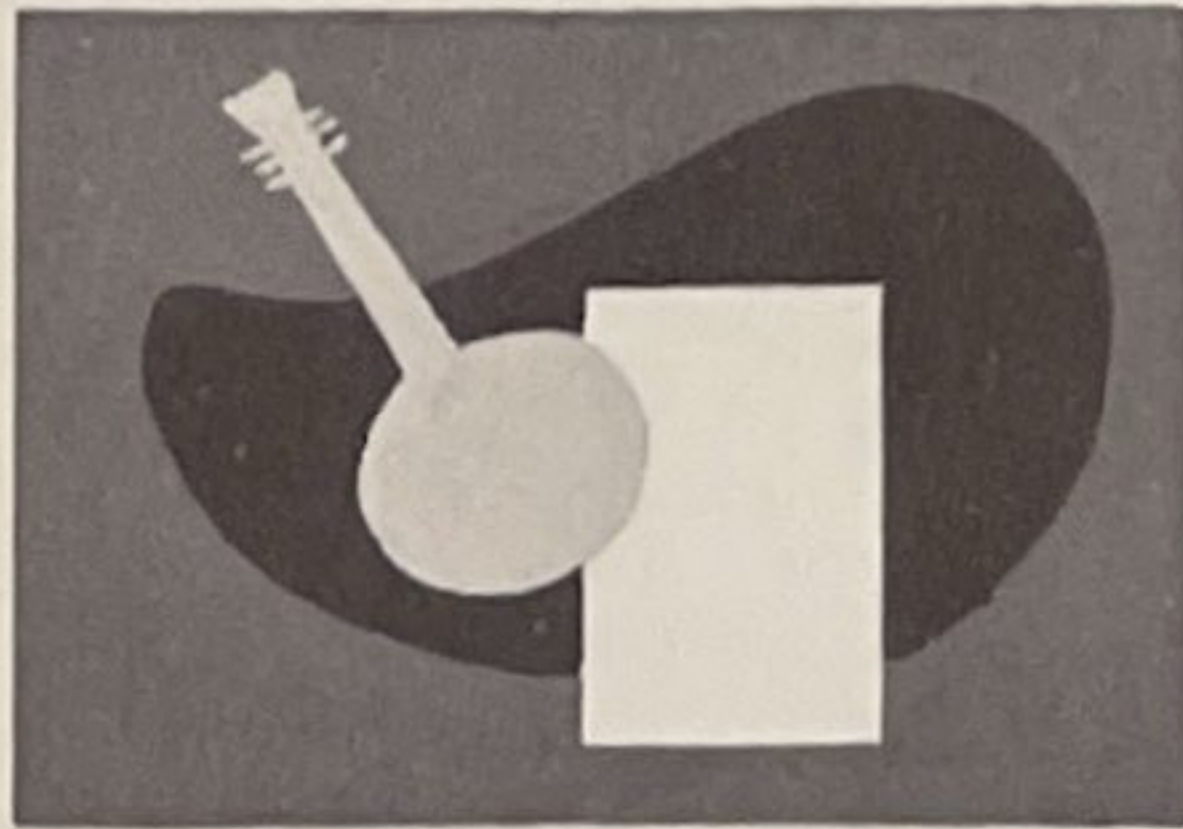
In order to develop a thorough appreciation of tone balance, you would do well to make many simple compositions in black and white with one or two extra tones — such practice will enable you to handle much more difficult problems where many tones are used.



In art, there are three main tones which must be considered. They are Light, Medium and Dark. Any one of these basic tones will show up either one or both of the other two. With more advanced pictures, it is of course necessary to break down our tone headings—light tones being divided into fairly light, very light, etc., and with the darker tones varying similarly in degrees of intensity. However, a light tone beside another light tone or a medium tone beside another medium tone will not show up the other. A dark tone beside another similarly dark tone is obviously equally useless. In a well composed line

drawing as in picture 1, the elements may all be shown up by outline only. If, as in No. 2, everything is painted in a medium tone, or tones that are too closely related, the result will be quite unsuccessful. If, on the other hand, as in picture 3, the elements are painted in different tones, then everything will show up because of tone contrast. This, coupled with counterbalance of the tone areas as in No. 4, will produce a balanced and happy result.





By using four tones: white, light gray, dark gray and black, in these abstract sketches, we show the arrangement of tone according to a basic plan. The accepted method is to have one tone dominate the other three in size or area. This does not necessarily make it the strongest. With

correct tone planning, the smallest area may have the greatest impact — as you can readily see. We have used these tone shapes simply and without surface textures; however, once we have established these tones we can build up their individual character and texture.

### Planning in tones and values

The earlier part of this lesson dealt primarily with composition in line. We must add to this, however, that nothing can be accomplished in getting the effect of light and shade without the use of tone. Tonal arrangements, bounded by line contours of different values, become tone patterns. Volume and mass of form are represented by tone. A dark or light object is dark or light only in relation to another object or area. For example, if one area in a picture is three tones darker than another, it has a three tone darker relationship. This relationship must be held throughout the composition and is what is meant by holding a picture in key. Many inexperienced artists merely "shade" their drawings — however, every bit of shading must fit correctly into a scale of values from white to black since all objects within our field of vision are separated from one another by definite differences in tone values.

A sound rule in composition is: the simpler the statement of a subject, the better the picture. In application, this rule resolves itself into the use of a few well organized and simple tone areas of few values. To prove this, let us assume that there are four basic tone plans. For our purpose, we will compose pictures with these four tonal approaches. In each case, we will select one tone for the background and place the other three against it. It is best to have one tone dominate the others in actual size or area. For example, we can use light gray as the dominant area with black, dark gray and white used against it, or we can use any one of the other three tones as the domi-

The organization of line and tone is the basis of the whole theory of pictorial design. Simply organized, tones and values will hold one against the other. Any pictorial subject will lend itself to these arrangements.



The linear design has been completed and a light gray tone has been washed in on the largest area. The blacks are added; the white tone is still the paper.



We have added the fourth tone—dark gray. This serves to separate the different elements from the background and adds variety to the design.



With the addition of texture and intermediate tones, the sketch is completed. A sound rule to follow is: the simpler the tone relationship, the better the picture.



## Composition and pictorial design

Famous Artists Schools, Inc.

All objects within a picture area are separate from one another because of tone but they are all kept in key as a whole because they are held together by correct value relationships, both in light and shadow. By an intelligent manipulation of values we can bring a great variety of treatments to any given subject.



All the values in this picture have been held to a middle key.



We force light against dark to obtain a more dramatic effect. It is important, nonetheless, to hold our values in key.



Dark against light can be handled the same way provided we again remember that the values must retain their relationship.

nant area with the remaining tones used in the same manner. It can be readily seen from these arrangements what a strong effect proper tone placement can have if based on the above methods. While these tone plans are not compulsory, when full strength of value, contrast and carrying power (as in advertising pictures) is desired, the use of a basic tonal plan must be faithfully adhered to. There are very few pictorial subjects which will not lend themselves to these simple tone arrangements. Many pictures turn out badly in spite of good qualities because insufficient effort was made in their tone organization.

The development of your finished picture from four to many tones involves the same principles as those employed when developing from two tones to three. It means the adding of intermediate values, to lend additional modeling to various elements of your composition. The approaches to tone arrangements which we have discussed so far have other variations. Instead of using three tones against one, we may take one or two tones and weave them through wider areas, or take two values and use them against one another for interest. The number of basic tonal arrangements that can be used are almost infinite, once you have learned the correct method and approach. The proper relationship of tones in your picture will cause it to take on a quality of light — if the values are right. The feeling of light you get into a subject is what will give your picture the quality of being alive.

In Lesson 10, the section on Dark and Light will introduce you to this very important phase of tone relationship in composition. We cannot urge you too strongly to make many small composition sketches on every subject. Use only four tones and give much thought and planning to each sketch you do — until you are sure you cannot do it better.

NORMAN ROCKWELL



White predominating suggests a happy atmosphere.

By permission Saturday Evening Post  
© 1943, 1948, 1949 Curtis Pub. Co.

The subject can suggest  
the tone plan.

BEN STAHL



Here, black indicates a mysterious dramatic quality. Note the fine counterbalance of tones.

JON WHITCOMB



Courtesy Ladies' Home Journal

Dark gray suggests romantic moonlight.

STEVEN DOHANOS



Light gray predominating gave Mr. Dohanos a fine area against which to design his other tones. This picture has a rainy but pleasant mood.



## Rhythm

As defined in music, rhythm is the disposition of tones and individual notes, so that they form a measured or timed movement in the succession of sound. Inasmuch as we measure and balance sound to produce rhythm and harmony in music — so must we measure areas and lines to produce rhythm and harmony in composing a good picture. Whether we wish to express rhythm in a decorative or pictorial way, there must be a measured succession or timed movement. In pictorial composition it can be best expressed with graduated and undulating shapes and lines. Rhythm helps the eye to find its way through the various elements and details of a pictorial design, through the repetition of shapes and forms as well as the graduation of values in tone and color.

The correct use of rhythm in a composition will give to your picture an actual sense of movement as well as harmony. Repetition of elements in bands of ornament appear in the arts of the earliest times, and this decorative theory has come down through the ages in all successive periods of design. An element repeated in a design without a change of shape or size will produce a monotonous effect. This is sometimes effective, if the purpose is to produce a stripe of single color, such as in a border design. In this case, the elements are made as much alike as possible. However, in pictorial composition where monotony must be avoided, effective rhythm is accomplished by varying the size and position of the repeated elements.

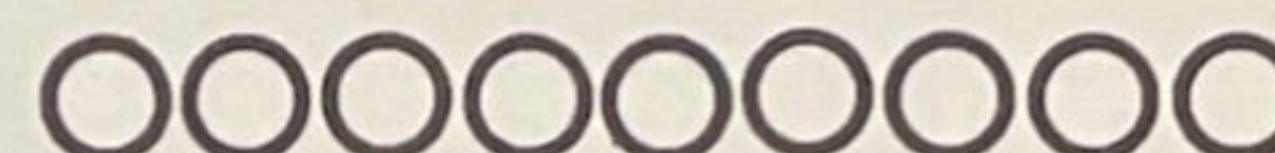
As an artist, you will find that the expert use of rhythm will be one of the strongest forces you can employ in designing a commercial picture or editorial illustration. It will enable you, by the intelligent use of tones, lines or measures, to emphasize the most important elements of your picture.

## Rhythm

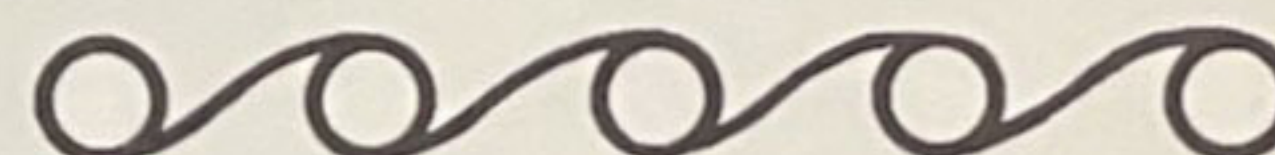


Rhythm may be achieved in a pictorial way by a measured succession of movement expressed by undulating lines or shapes—note the trees, the hills and the water.

### Understanding rhythm through ornamental design



The squares and circles above have been repeated with such regularity they have become monotonous.



By leaving out one or more squares or circles, and introducing some other connecting line or ornament, we break the monotony.



While the measures are equal, the flow of line from one measure into the other gives rhythm to these last two lines.



AL PARKER

—Courtesy Ladies' Home Journal



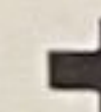
The graduated measures of the plant form in the foreground against the two figures add to the rhythm of the figures themselves as well as the entire composition.



Courtesy John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co.



BEN STAHL



Curved lines can flow into other curved lines, thus connecting two or more units into one main unit.





## Composition and pictorial design

Famous Artists Schools, Inc.



HAROLD VON SCHMIDT  
By permission Saturday Evening Post  
© 1947 Curtis Pub. Co.

In creating the point of emphasis, the direction of line and the balance of masses and values must be planned so they will lead to the center of interest—the figure on the launch.



The subordinate elements must serve the main elements in a picture without calling undue attention to themselves. In this case the main elements are the syrup barrel, the cat and the salesman.

Courtesy Log Cabin Syrup  
Division of General Foods Corp.

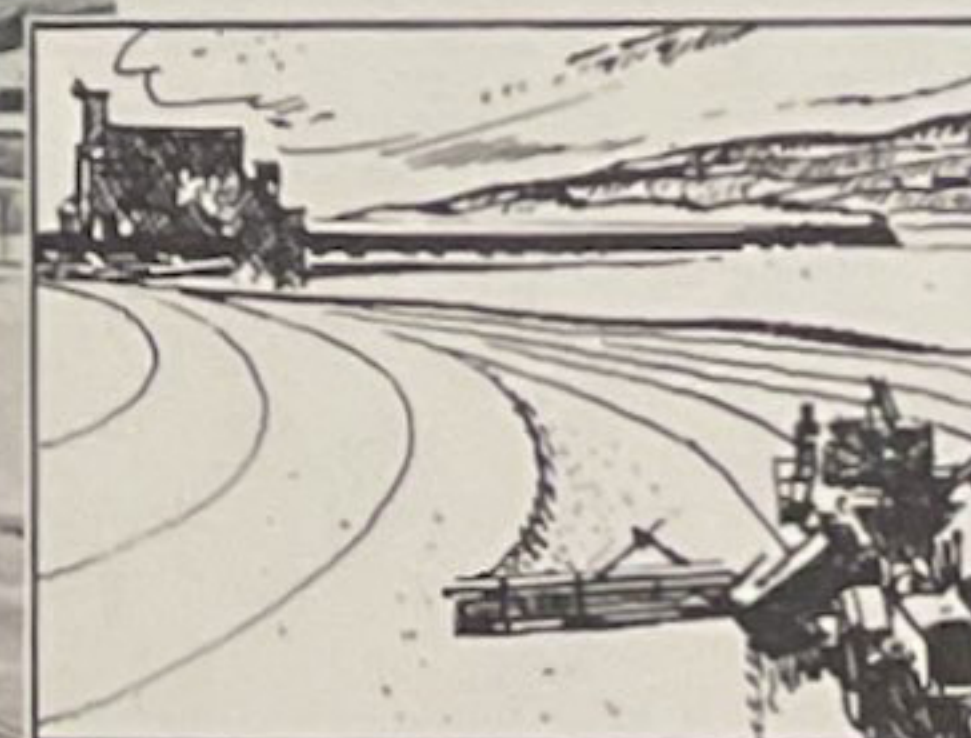
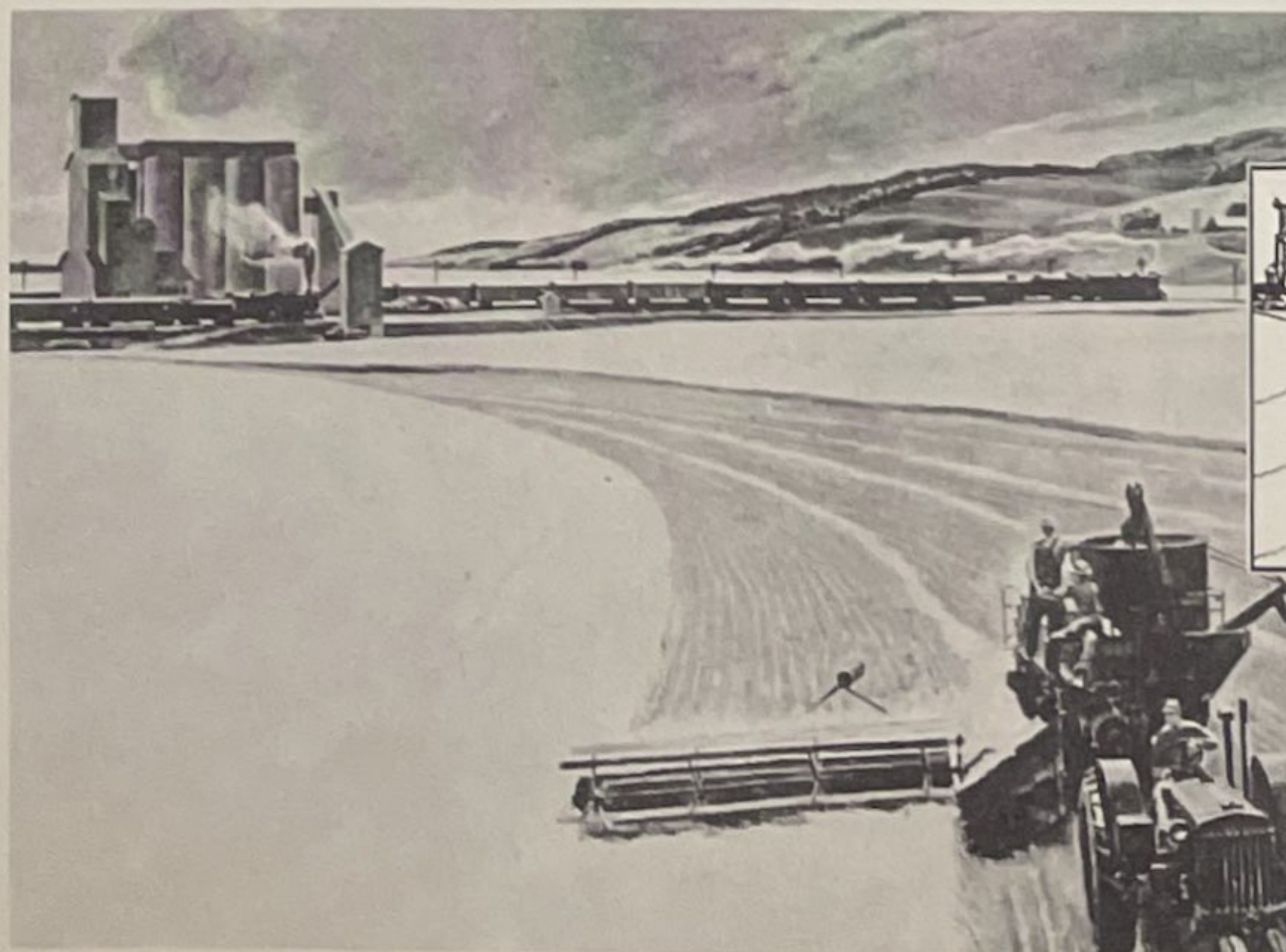
ALBERT DORNE

## Objective rhythm and emphasis

The forces of convergence concern a single idea, but your composition is often not complete with only one unit of interest. Another unit of interest is sometimes necessary so that a relationship is created which helps to establish the single, main idea. However, the *additional thought should not detract from the original theme*. The chief interest must always represent the purpose for which the picture is composed.

Objective rhythm is the planning of a picture so that the eye unconsciously finds its way through the designed elements of the picture to a focal point or to the objects of interest. In establishing the point of emphasis, the composition, direction and arrangement of line (by this we mean design) is all important. The design must be *planned* so that it will lead the eye to this center of interest in your picture. This is also accomplished through the graduation of tone and color and by the rhythmic repetition and direction of shapes or lines in the composition. Placement, balance and size of elements are sometimes secondary in importance to this particular point in achieving emphasis.

Objective rhythm and emphasis, used expertly, will always enable you to emphasize the points of interest in your picture.



The relationship of any object to another is accomplished either by rhythm of line or interval, or by similarity in contrast in values—in this case from the lower right to the upper left and across the picture.

PETER HELCK

Courtesy Pennsylvania Railroad



## Harmony and unity

Whenever the elements in a picture have similar characteristics or some relationship that is distinctly evident—they are in harmony.

Repeating a shape throughout a picture is a way of creating harmony. The effect will be to produce movement which will please the eye, if the movement has rhythm. In accordance with the rules for all good organization, pictorial composition must have a singularity of theme, and all the elements that comprise the picture should blend well to establish the main idea. Developing the chief interest in your picture so it will dominate all others, is a good way to achieve this result and to unify the various elements which might otherwise appear scattered. To preserve a picture's unity, the secondary elements in a picture must be arranged to support the main idea and lead the eye to it.

In studying harmony, we consider the same principles that apply to unity. The subordinate elements must serve the dominant elements in a picture without calling undue attention to themselves. Harmony is the result of unity, and unity is the artistic balance, spacing and placement of elements in their proper rhythmic relationship in your picture.

Harmony is the result of unity which in turn is created by the considered spacing, placement and balance of the elements in your picture.



BEN STAHL

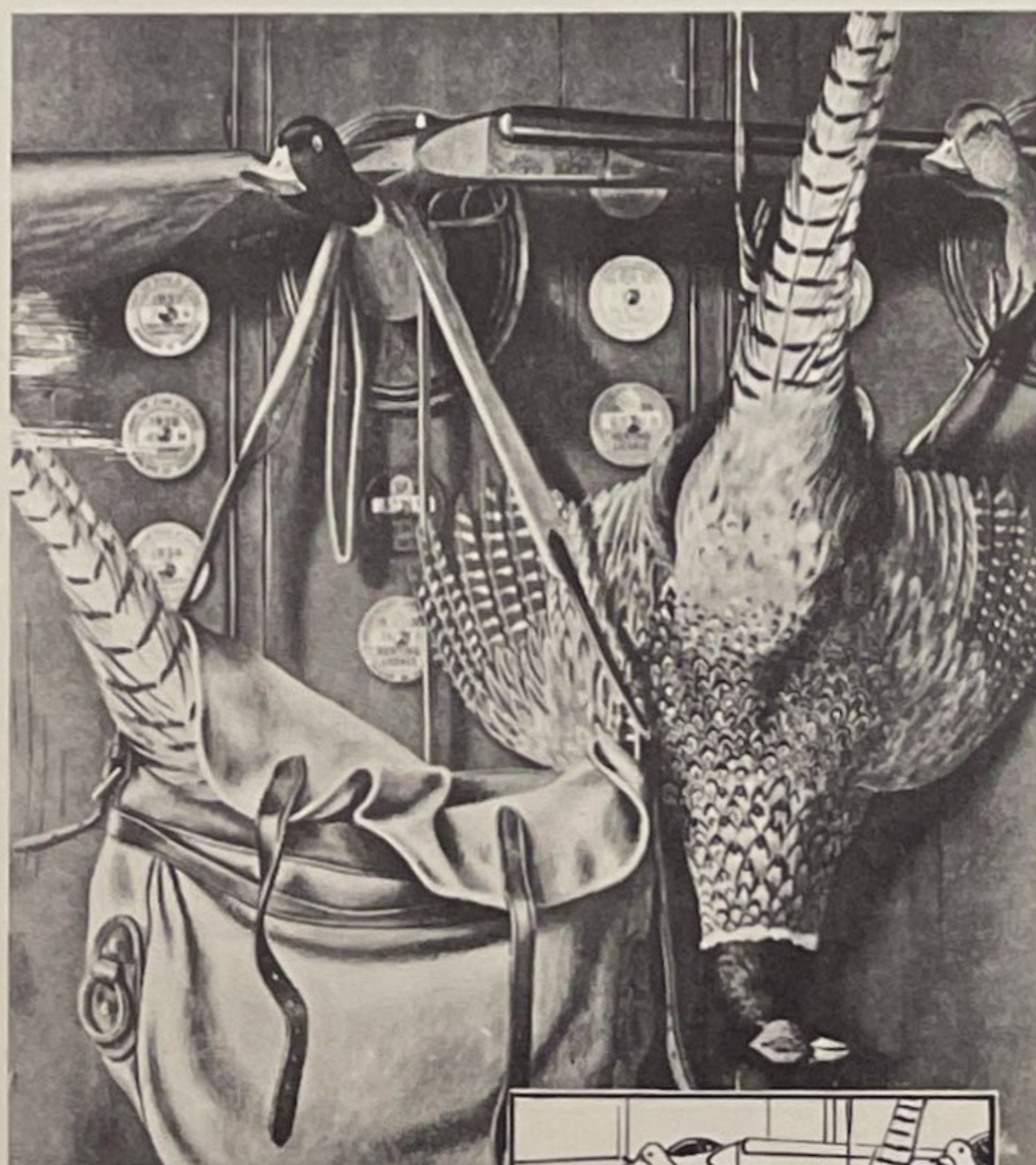
Wrong



Right



The picture on the left contains three elements: a man, a barn and a tree. A lack of harmony is apparent because each element requires individual attention. By having the man overlap the barn and by giving the tree more area we have tied all the elements together. By doing this and by slightly changing the line of the foreground and the direction of the clouds, we have unified all the elements and created a harmonious composition.



JOHN ATHERTON

It is the unequal disposition of dominant notes, compensated by variety in size and emphasis which creates the picture with compositional harmony.



HAROLD VON SCHMIDT



Each element in the design of this picture combines with the others to create movement, rhythm and unity.



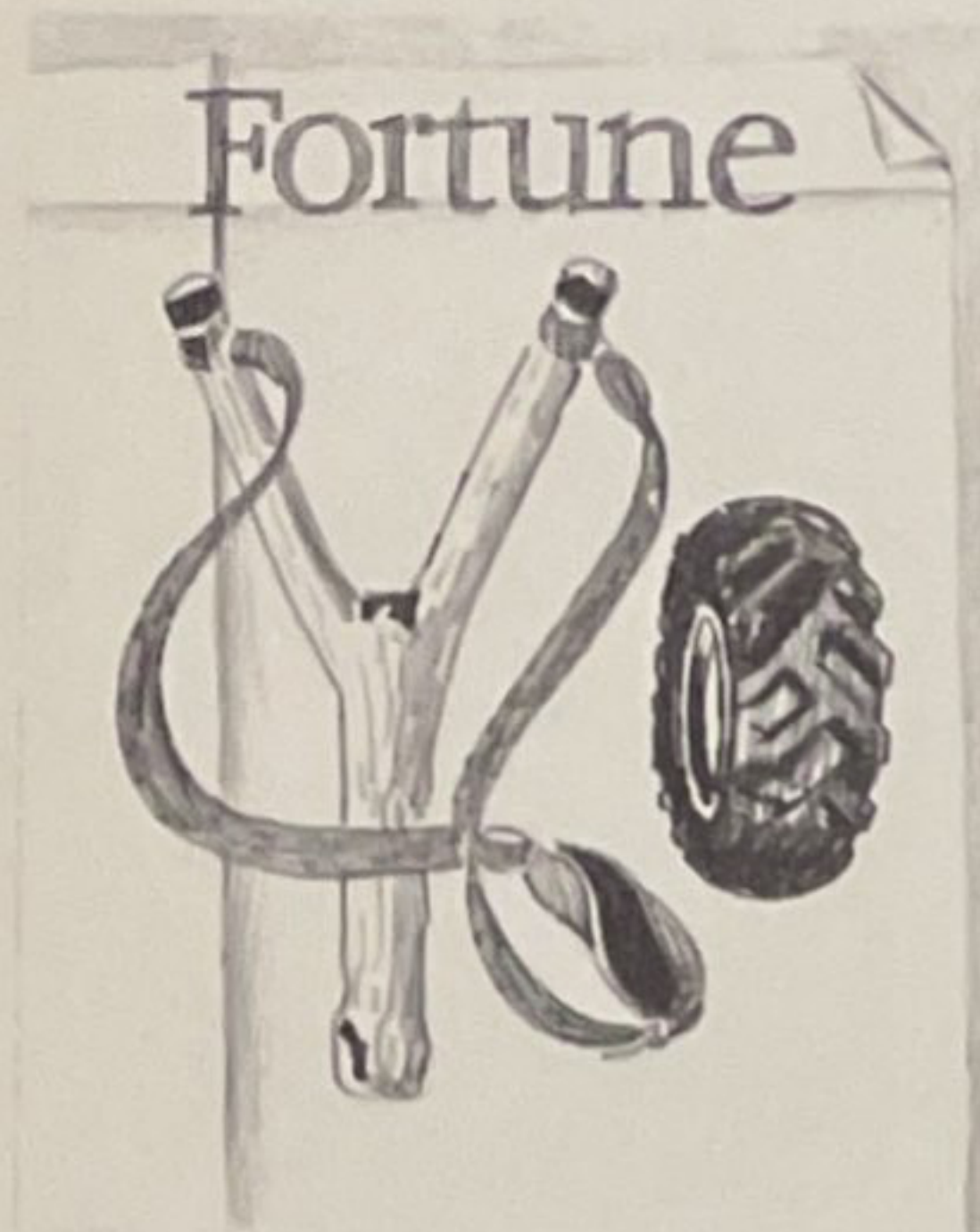
FRED LUDEKENS

Courtesy Southern Pacific Railroad

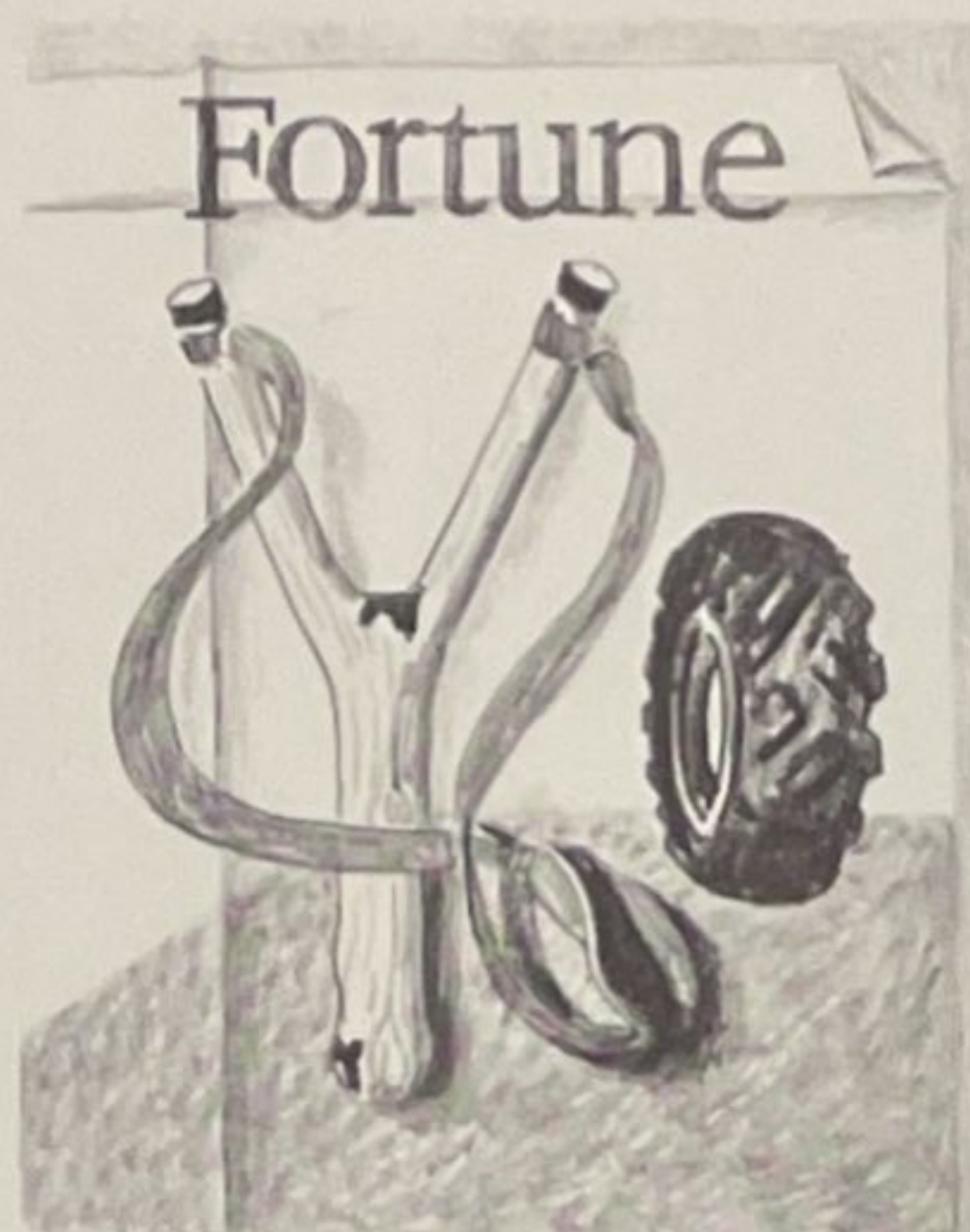


Geometrical variation in the patterns and shapes adds to the movement from spot to spot. This geometry not only gives interest but also adds direction to each pattern.

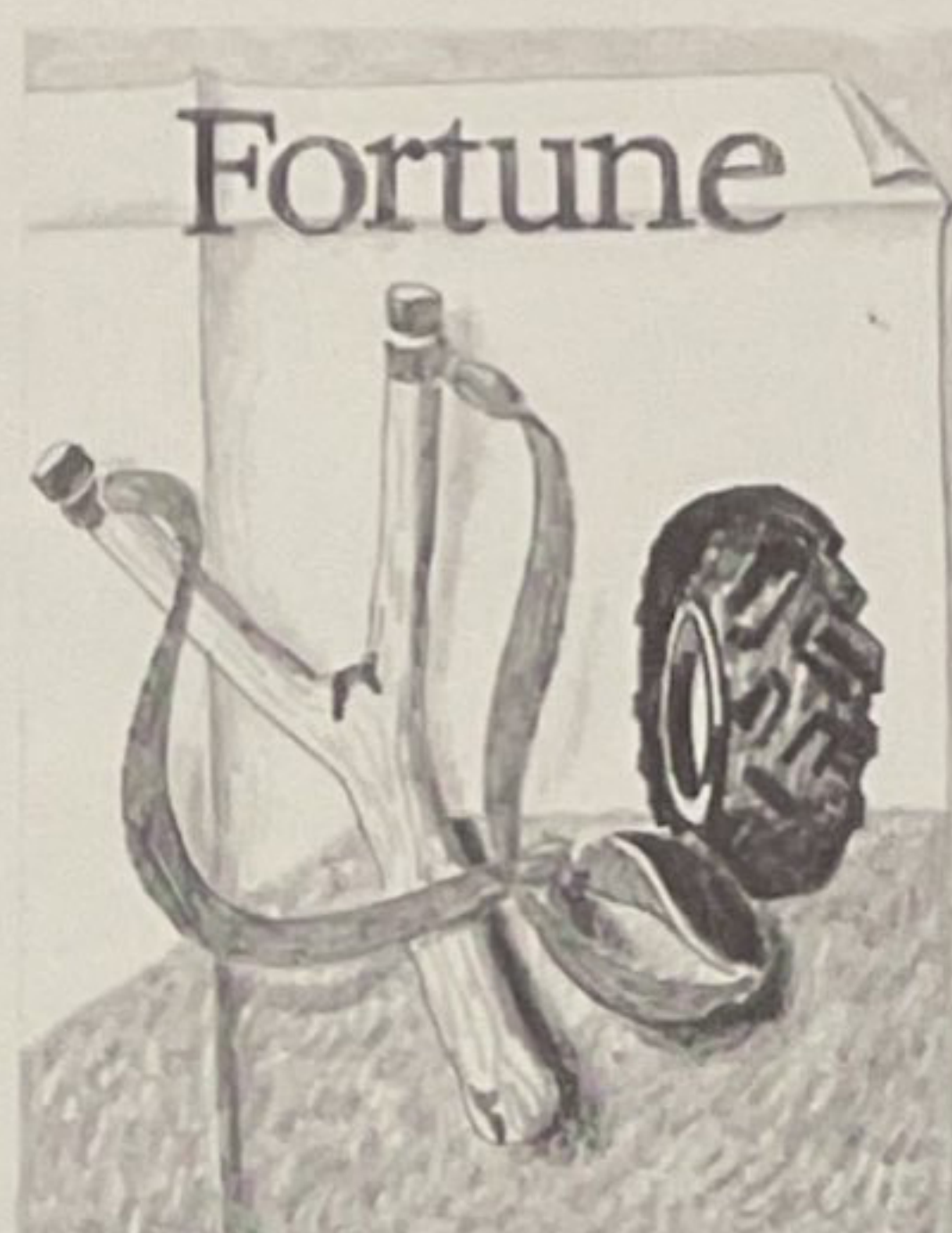


Design in composition — *Alberton*

1 Here are the elements to be used in the cover design. The logotype is set, and the shape of the paper for the background will remain the same throughout. The subject is rubber.



2 The textured shape at the bottom is introduced at once as a means of tying together the two forms, and to give a "base" to the design. It also gives variety to the background.



3 The slingshot has been tipped to one side to lose some of the rigidity of the arrangement. But this does not seem successful the way it is shown here, leaning out, rather than into the picture.



4 By tipping the slingshot the other way, the design is at once improved. There is a slight overlapping of the tire as well which is better but is still not right.



5 In this finished design the tire has been brought nearer the center, allowing the slingshot to overlap a little more. The small figure was introduced solely to give "scale" to the tire. The ruled lines on the textured base suggest a third dimension or depth, leading into the design.

Courtesy Fortune

### How to achieve unity and compactness in design through the use of overlapping and integrated forms.

A picture requires a certain "architecture." It should be held together by lines or forms just as a building is held together by a framework. In the sketches above, I have shown how, by combining shapes and forms together, by moving them about and overlapping them here and there, you can achieve this architectural quality.

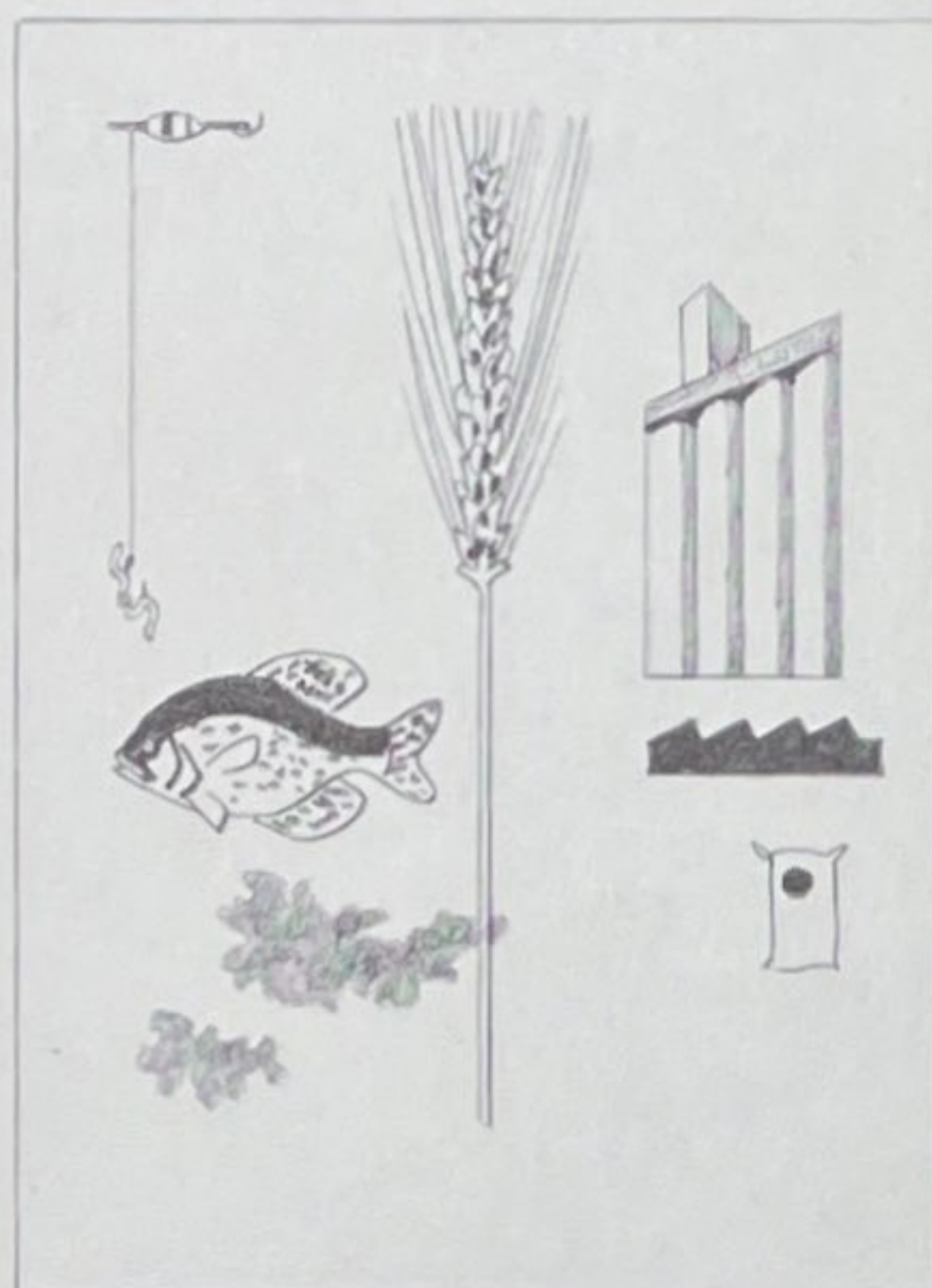
These examples are limited in scope because of the brevity demanded in explaining the idea in simple form. I have used the original group of objects or forms in each example without

altering their sizes; I have only changed their arrangement. The opportunities for further variety would naturally be greatly increased by the alteration of the size or shape of each form.

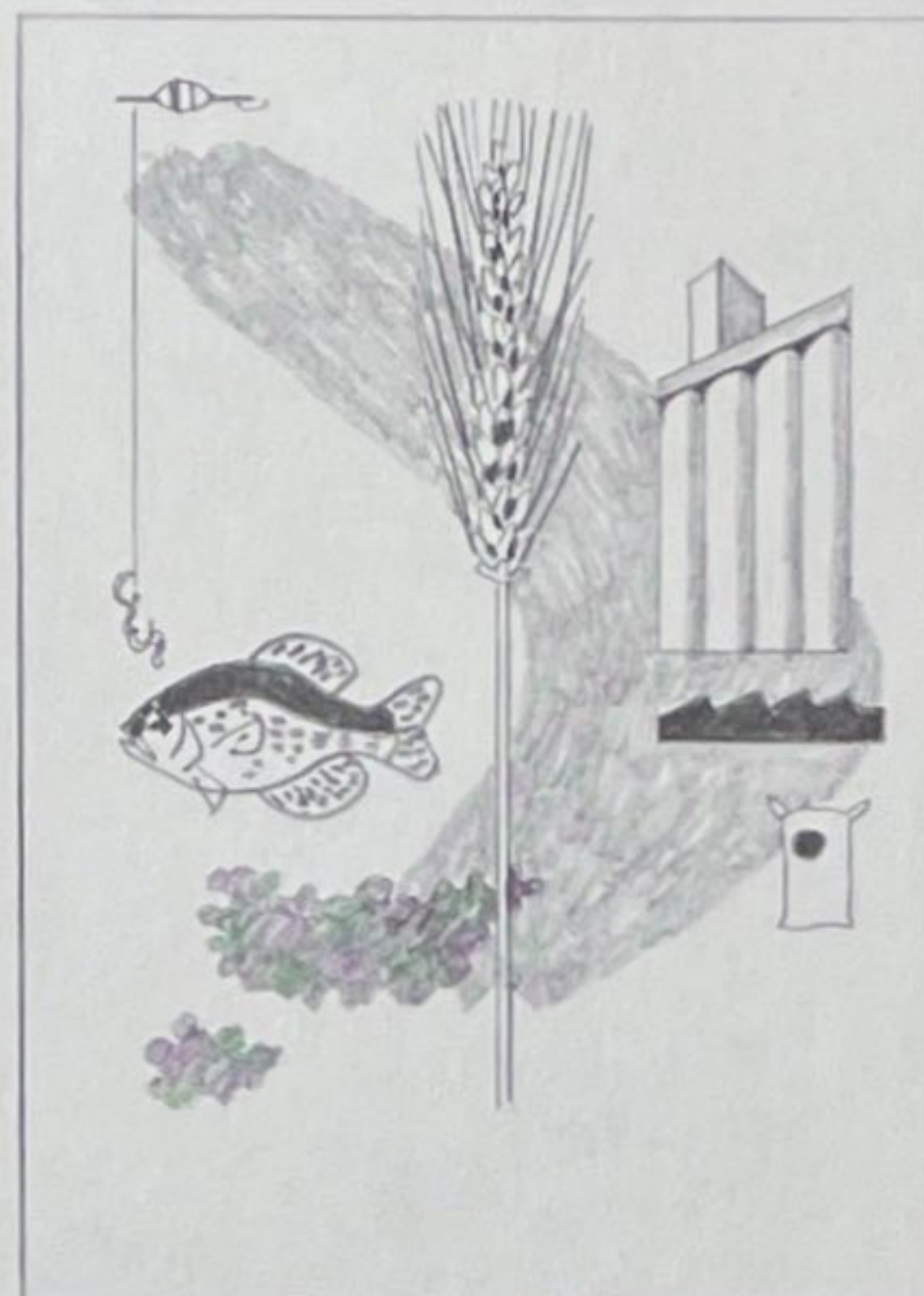
In composing designs such as these, or any picture for that matter, you should strive for "strength" in design. Your forms and lines should not be "brittle." For example, in drawing a figure you should avoid any suggestion of a "link sausage" look. The lines should flow into the forms and, if the movement changes, it could be picked up on another side or contour.



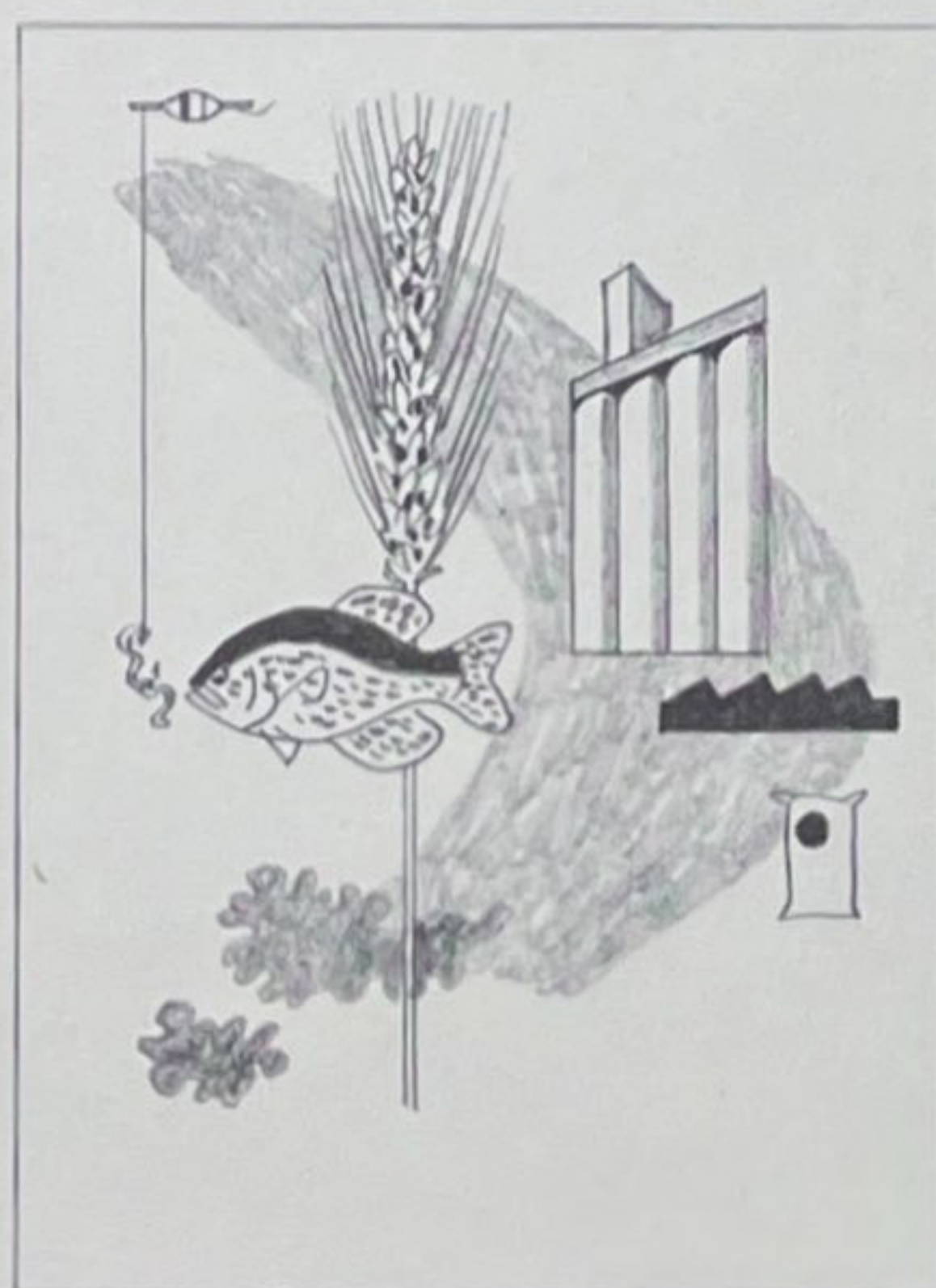
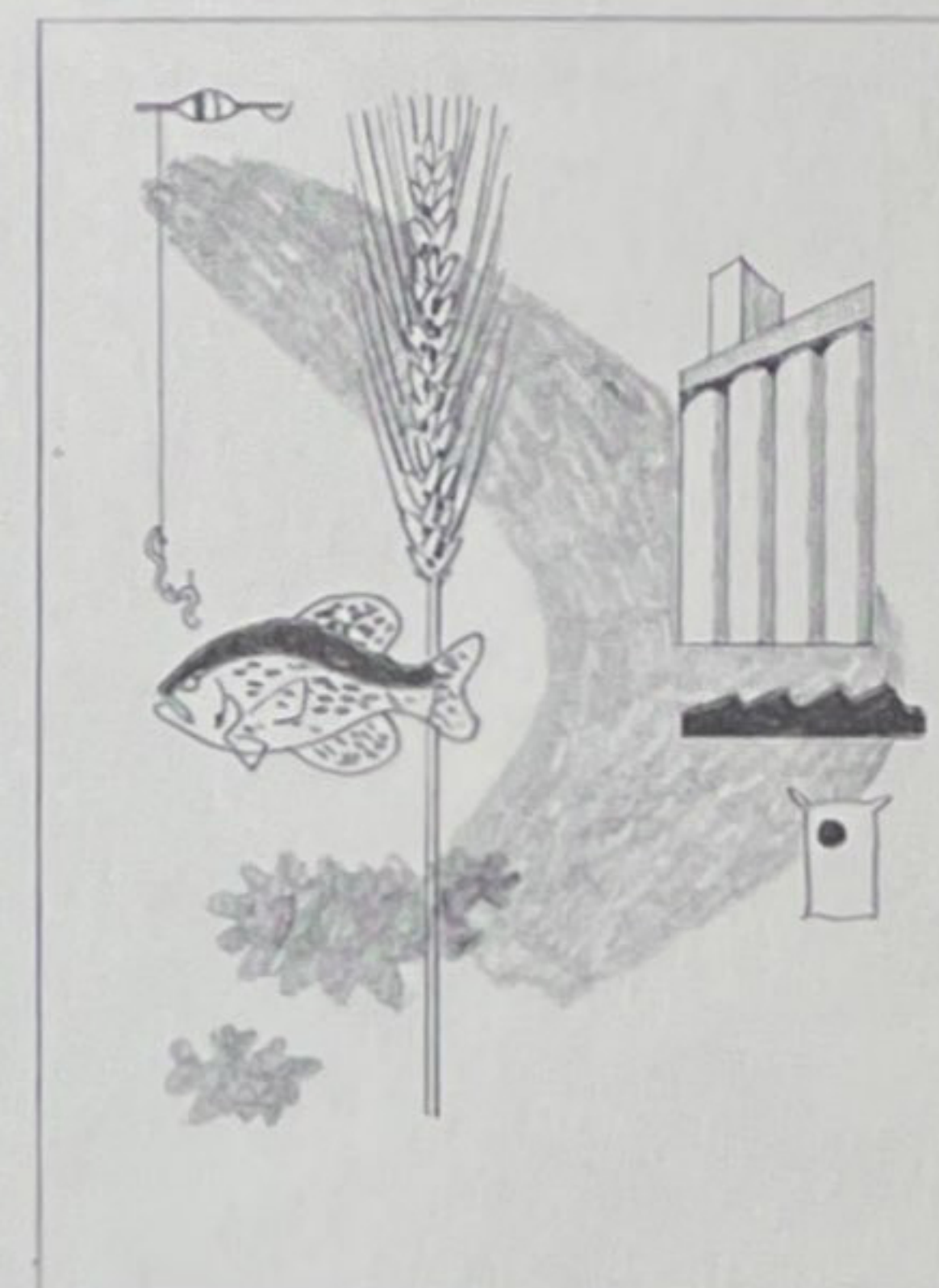
1 Here I have shown the elements which will be used in making a design. I will not consider the idea in these examples, only arrangement. The irregularly shaped forms at the bottom are to represent Minnesota lakes. The other objects are also typical of that state. In the following sketches I will show how to improve the scattered and unrelated design by various means.



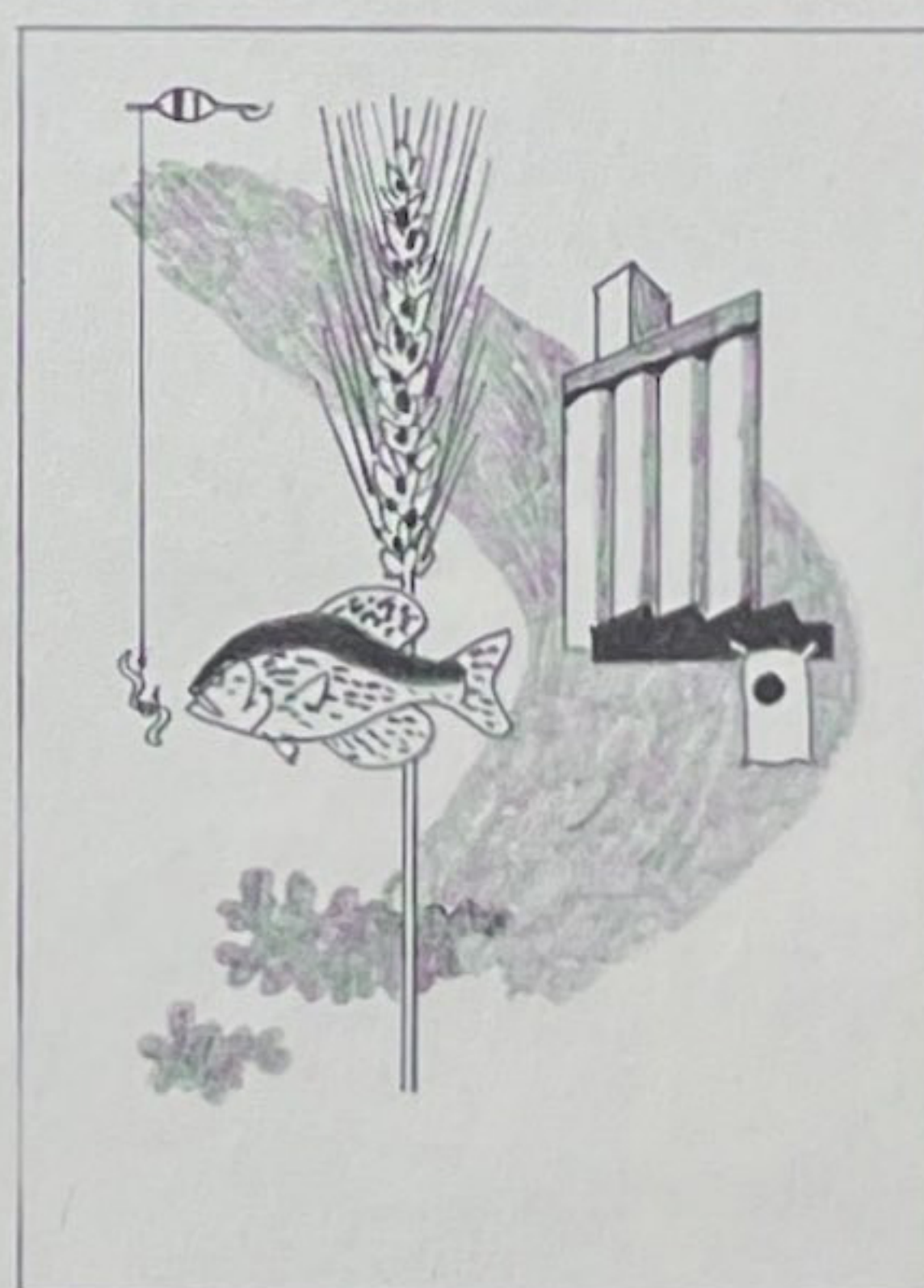
2 It is obvious that a background shape such as I have introduced will help tie the objects together. The curve it makes leads logically from the small float at the top through other forms to the bottom. Otherwise the composition is unchanged.



3 The stalk of wheat has been moved to the left. It was in the center before and cut the design in two. It immediately helps by tying in with the fish which was too isolated.



4 Here the fish has been brought nearer the center, placing the baited hook in front of its nose where it belongs. The grain elevator was moved to the left into the composition. Already we have a much more compact grouping.



5 The elevator, the small dark factory form and the sack of flour have been combined as a unit. This not only helps the design but also expresses a literal compactness as well since the forms are all indicative of one industry.



6 This is the finished, printed design. A few lines of type and the small trademark have been added. The lake shapes were enlarged and moved upward and make a sort of background, in places, for the fish. Now all the scattered units are brought together into a single compact design.

Courtesy Container Corporation of America

Your pictures should have "compactness," they should never seem to fly apart. One of the reasons for overlapping certain forms in a picture is to achieve this compactness. Even in a very open or spacious composition you can avoid a weak, loose feeling by controlling the forms, grouping them here and there and allowing the spaces to register as relief from the forms.

The spaces around and behind forms are as important as the forms themselves. When you draw a shape against a background, make the background as interesting in design as the shape

placed upon it.

Never permit repetition to become monotonous. Its purpose is to add strength or accentuate an idea. Forms of the same size are best when not of the same shape or color. Those of the same color or shape are better when of a different size. And any picture should have variety of texture as well. The above examples demonstrate how a variety of textures can avoid monotony in pictures.



## Pictorial composition—*R.F.* (Robert Fawcett)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to consider composition for an illustration in the abstract. The situation idea must first be understood, and the composition grows from that. In this western story a tenderfoot, out practicing with his revolver, is surprised by a westerner who later proves to be a good friend. The tenderfoot, a young man, is apprehensive of his prowess as a marksman, for he knows that he is going to be called upon to defend himself later in a gun duel with a villainous character, who so far has not appeared in the story. The following picture sequence shows the growth of the visual idea — the tentative beginning, and finally the idea as it jelled. The illustration

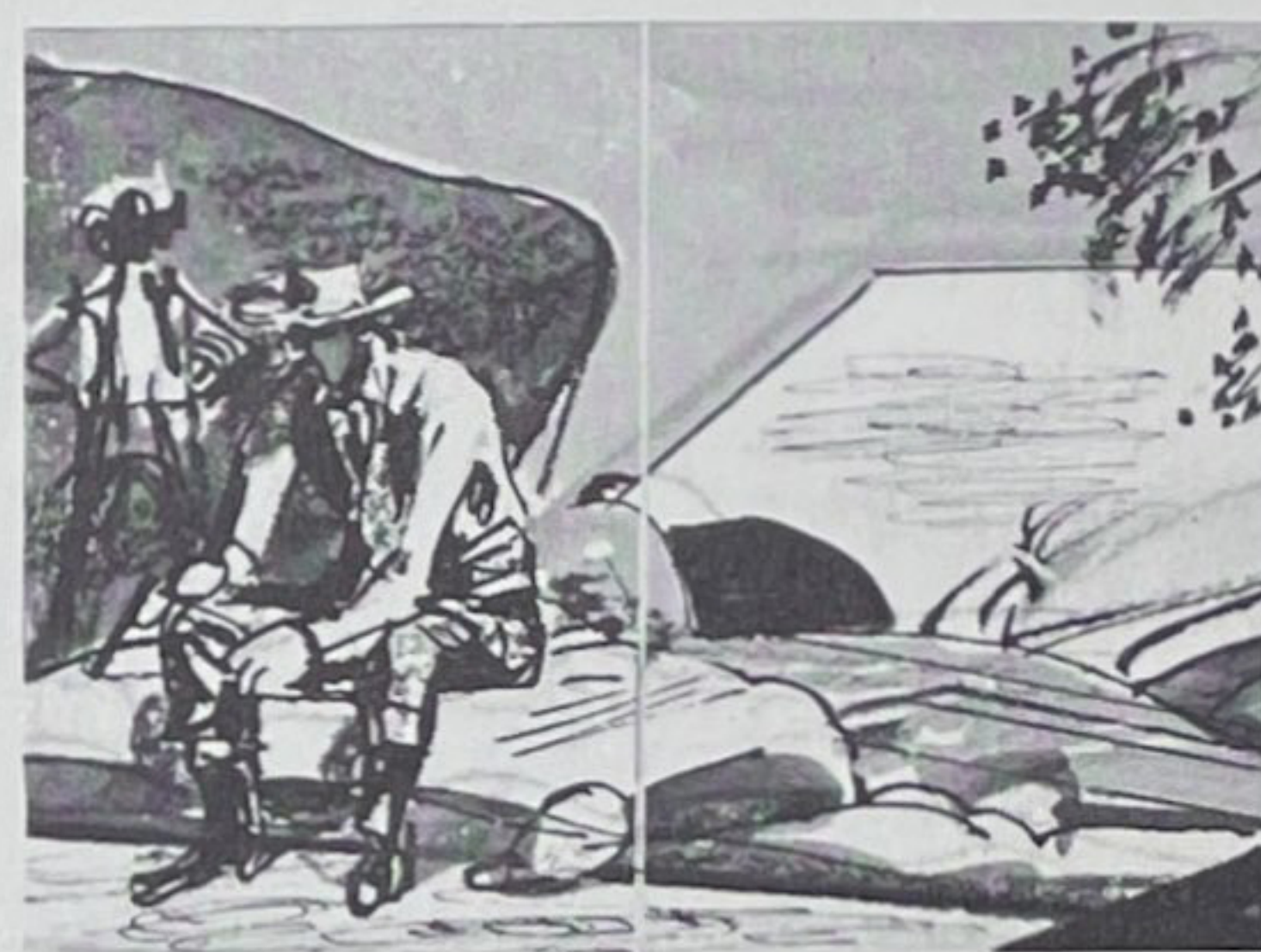
was scheduled for two pages — a spread; but inasmuch as the text and title are to take a large part of one of the pages, the action must be confined to the other one, leaving the text page with large simple shapes from which a mortise can be cut for type and the title superimposed without radically spoiling the picture. A line through the middle of these rough sketches reminds one of the "gutter," where the pages meet, for the illustration must be designed to avoid having an important element come at this point and be cut in half when it appears printed in the magazine.



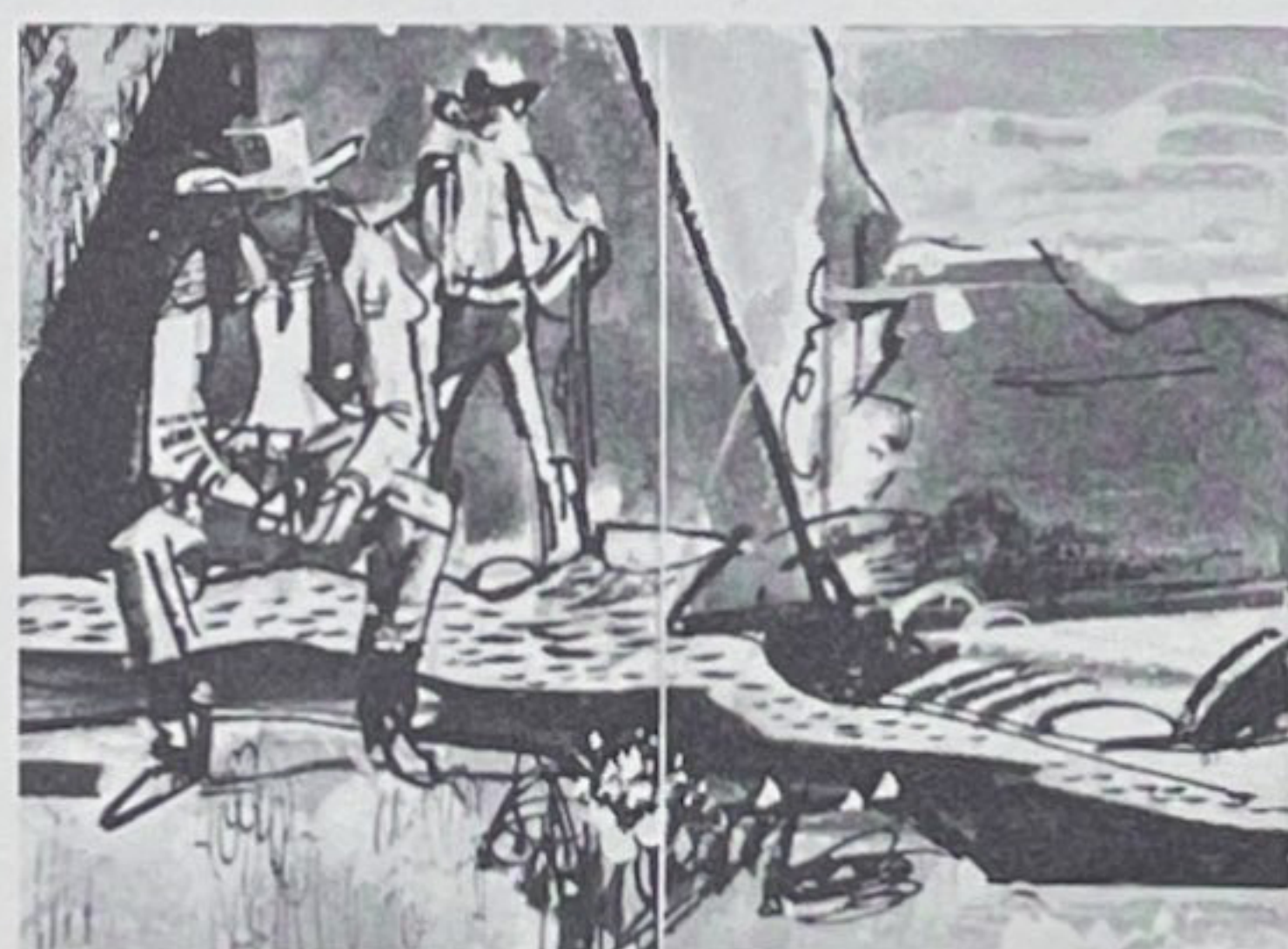
1 This first composition divides the characters too much and is the situation a moment after the original one of surprise. The two are now talking calmly, and the composition lacks tension.



2 This one brings them more together and leaves the right hand page clear for type, but still it is not a very exciting conception and was soon discarded.



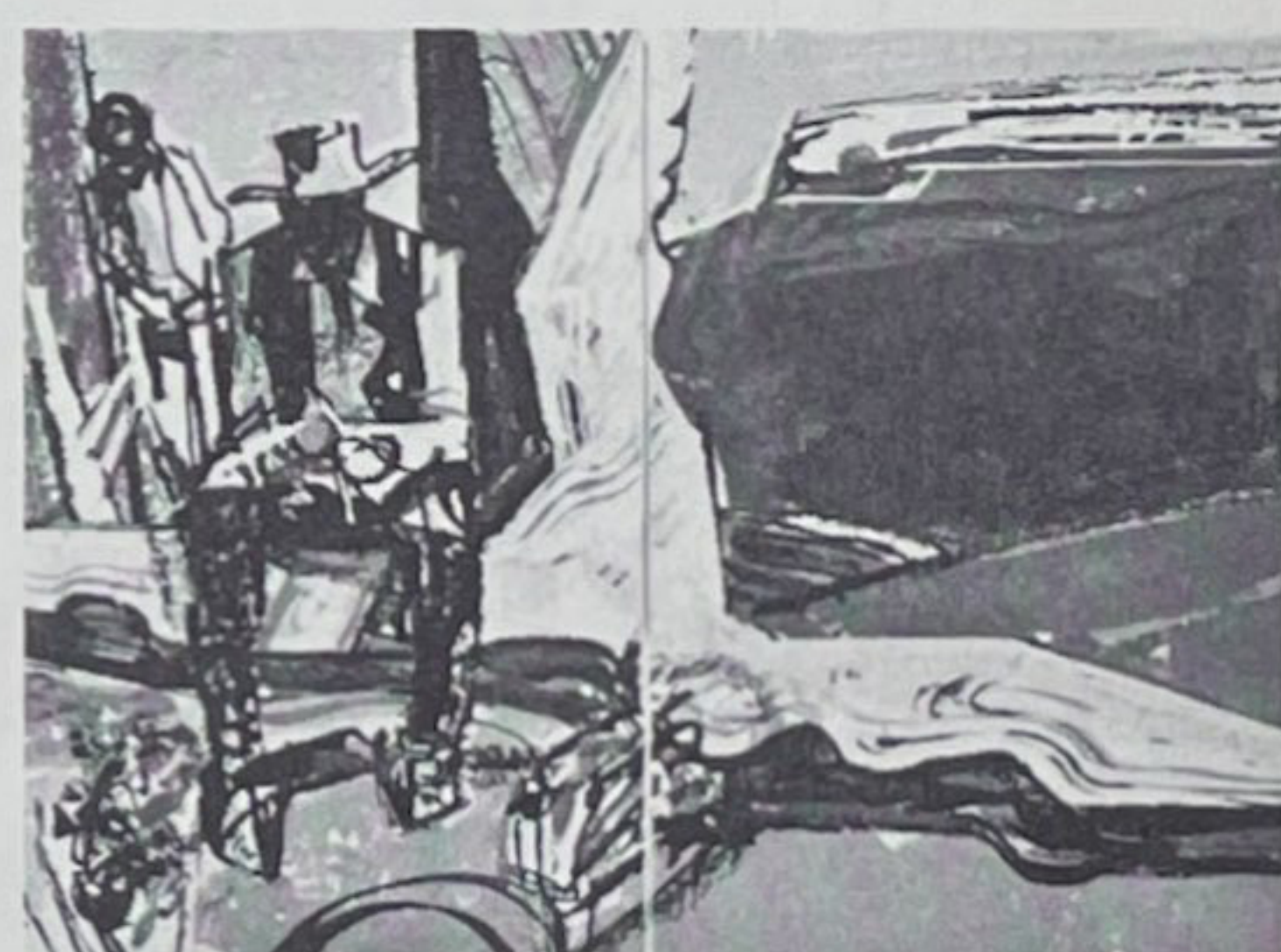
3 The idea of the secondary character coming from behind seems a better solution. It is now a question of organizing the other elements to "place" the scene definitely in rocky western terrain.



4 A fallen dead tree on which the important character is sitting contemplating his target seems better than the rocks in picture 3. The secondary character is still coming in from behind, with the other one as yet unaware of his presence.



5 Now it begins to boil down to essentials. The dead tree assumes more importance but the figures are too small — the composition is not dynamic enough.



6 Finally, I bring the main character closer to the reader, make the dead tree a part of the design and allow the unobserved westerner to lean casually against a rock further back. Large hills in shadow solve the problem of simple shapes for the right hand page.



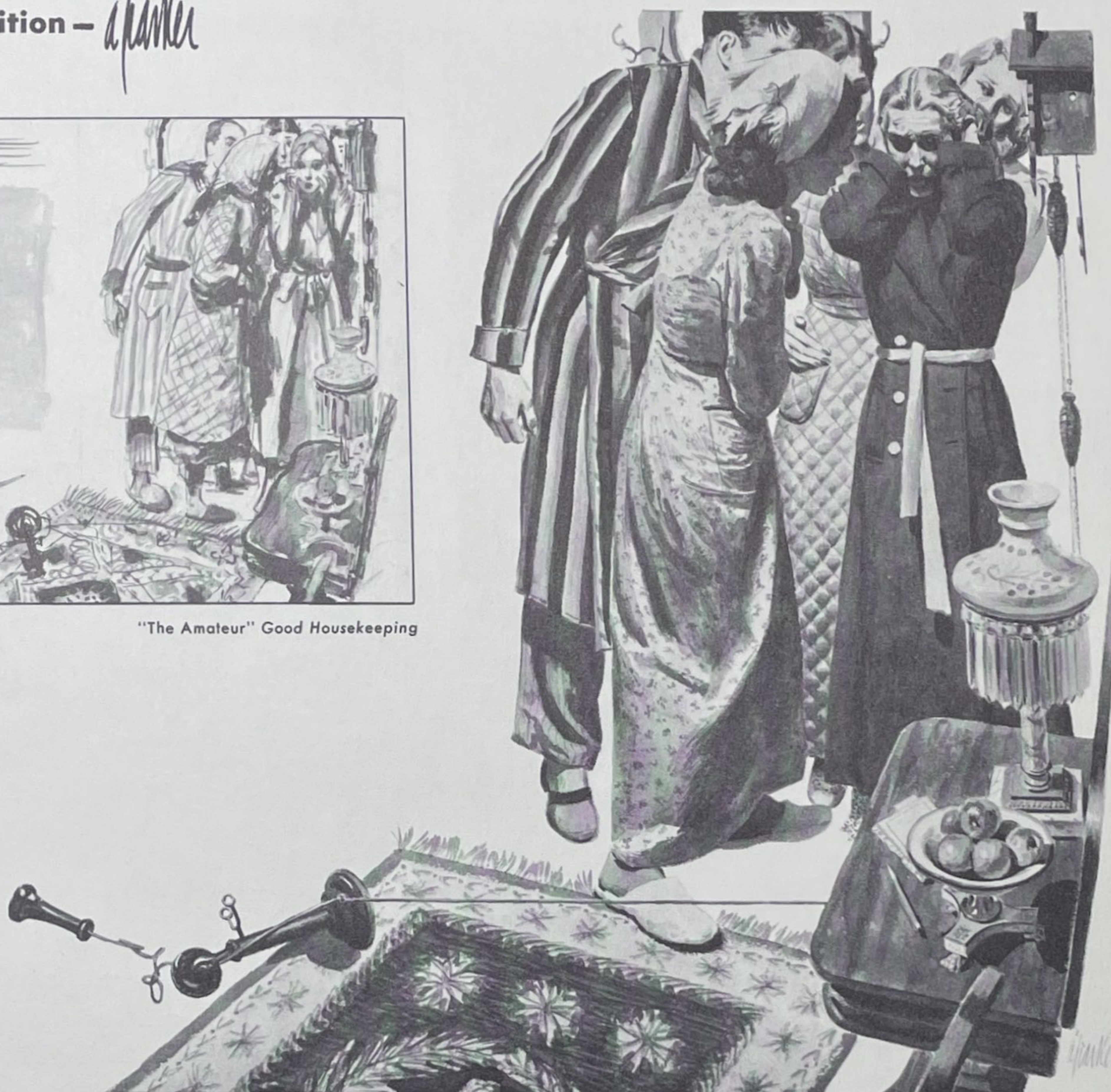
7 The finished picture. It has simplicity, an element of drama, and all the possible complications which we anticipated at the beginning have been avoided. This is an example of one way to consider composition.



Pictorial composition — *a. parker*

This is the original rough sketch of the two-page layout design and composition

"The Amateur" Good Housekeeping



MOOD: Mystery.

AUDIENCE: Women.

REQUIREMENTS: Two color. Top and bottom bleed only.

MEDIUM: Ink and wash on drawing board.

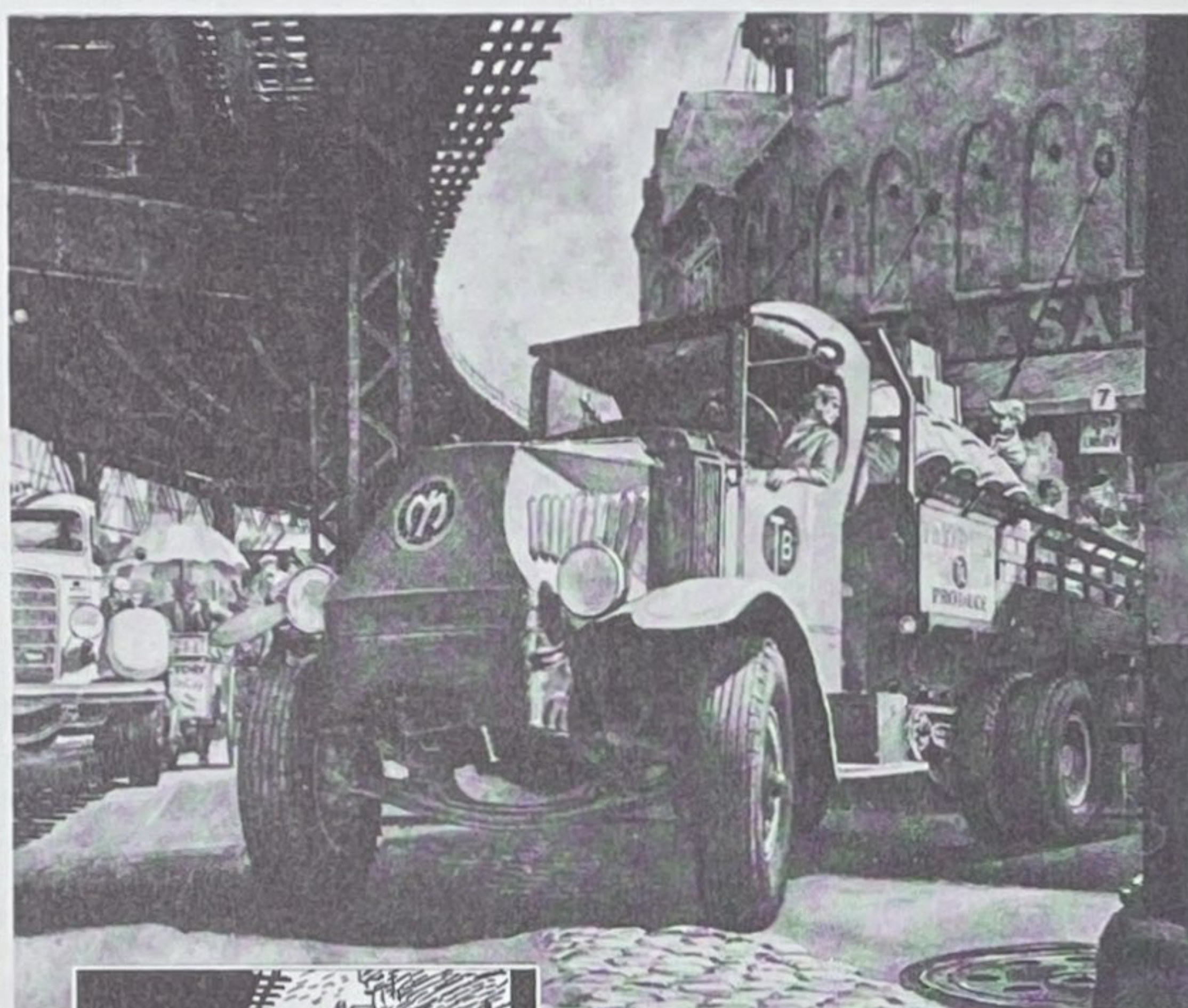
STORY: This was a murder mystery. The woman holding her ears has just screamed, "There's a murderer loose, they phoned, said I'd be the next." Your sympathy goes to this character because she is in danger. Actually, she is lying about the phone call because she committed the murder!

The two women in front were photographed before I drew them. The rest of the figures, including the props, were drawn from life. This illustration was done in black and red. A flat pink tint of colored ink was laid over the entire drawing. The illustration was then rendered in wash. Note how everything of importance was solved in the rough (upper left).

In doing an illustration, it is important to remember not to give away the plot. In a mystery story the guilty ones should

appear innocent. I have tried to avert suspicion as the author intended. I used the grotesque telephone and put the taut cord parallel to the bottom of the page to give a tight, tense feeling for which the phone call was responsible. I felt it best to silhouette the group and setting to give more contrast and wallop to the scene. Since I could not use full color, the darks and lights had to be made to work in exciting patterns. Interest was given to these patterns by providing the man with a striped robe, a challis print on a girl's robe, a quilted robe on another girl and a woven design on the rug. The rug was fringed to give a variety of edge because of the cut-out outer edges all about. The three light buttons and belt on the dark main figure made her stand apart and have importance. There was no side bleed, so the cuckoo clock and table were placed to give an illusion of bleed rather than a straight edge which would have left a meaningless white band down the right side.





PETER HELCK

Courtesy of Mack Trucks

**Truck advertisement**

This is an excellent example of the use of objective rhythm. Note how the curve of the elevated railway leading down, meets the opposing line of the truck form creating a positive center of interest.



ALBERT DORNE

Courtesy Pan-American Coffee Bureau

**Coffee advertisement**

While there are three points of interest in this picture — the young couple, the waiter and the coffee cups — the cups hold the center of interest because of the direction of line and the use of values.



AUSTIN BRIGGS

Courtesy The Watchmakers of Switzerland

**Jewelry advertisement**

While the product is very small, the attention of the three figures directed on the act of giving the wrist watch plus the emphasis of the man make a fine example showing how to fix a point of interest.

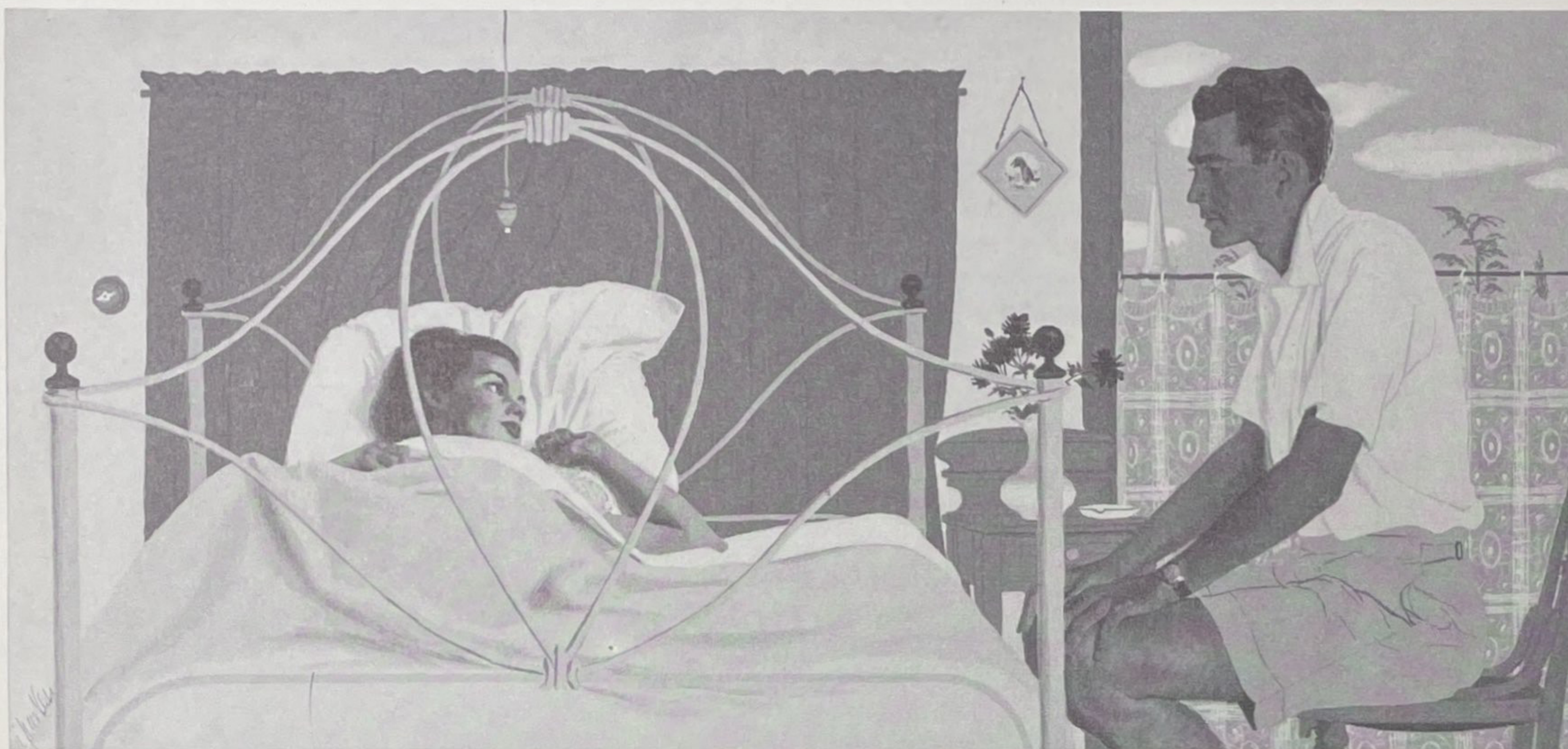
**Commercial art — center of interest**

In accordance with the scheme for all good advertising pictures, compositions must have singularity of theme. All the elements which comprise the picture material should blend or co-operate in establishing the main idea, as well as focus upon the product or story being told — which is the point of interest.

People never linger in admiration over an advertising picture, unless it is forceful or beautiful. Such a picture will arrest interest and the reader will unconsciously be lead on to read the wording and study the product advertised — (this is one of the most important functions of your picture) .

Remember that in an advertising picture, the primary effort is to appeal to the interest of a possible buyer of the product featured in your composition. Only a well composed picture or advertisement possesses this power.





Above is the illustration for "Mary Hallam," done in gouache on gesso panel.

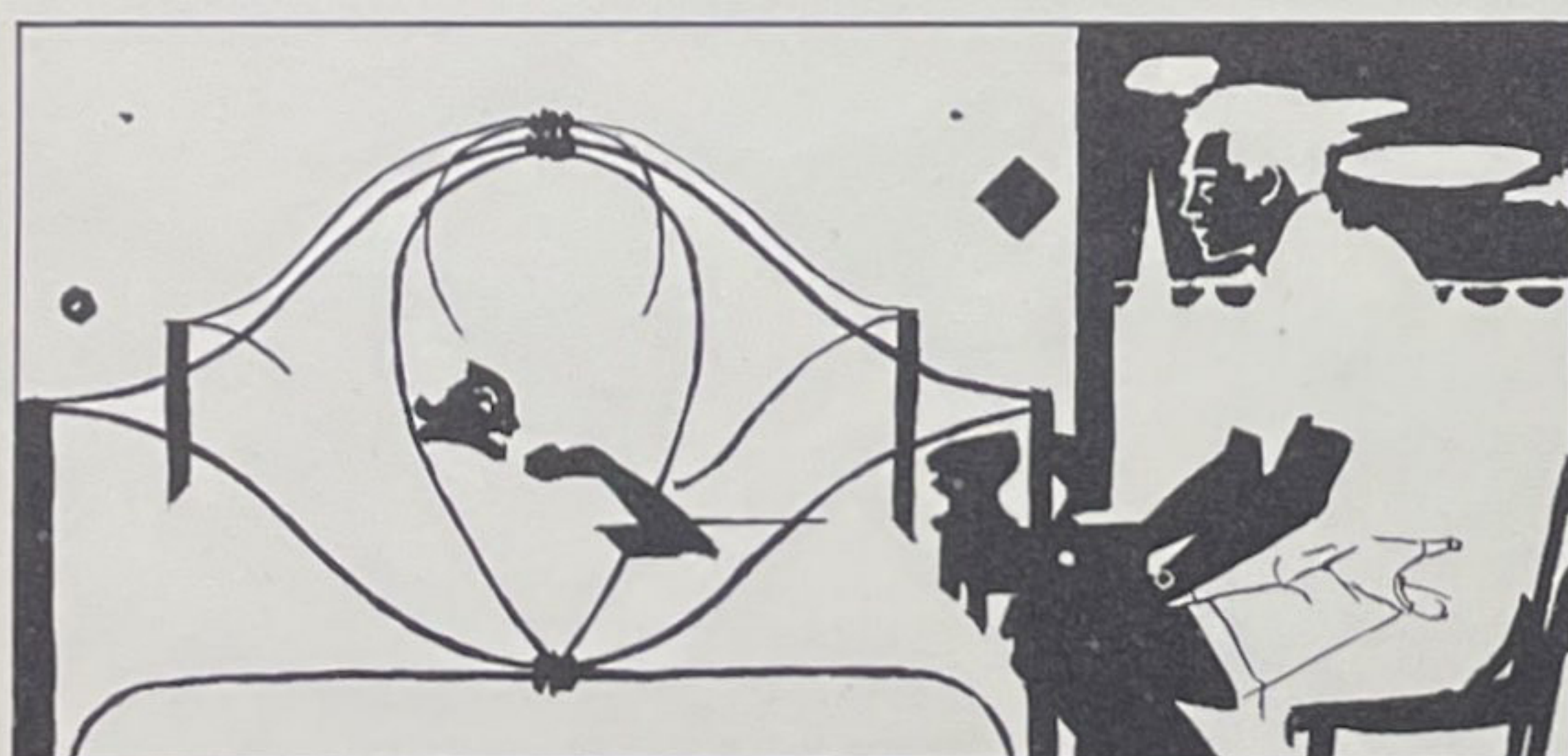
*Ladies' Home Journal.*



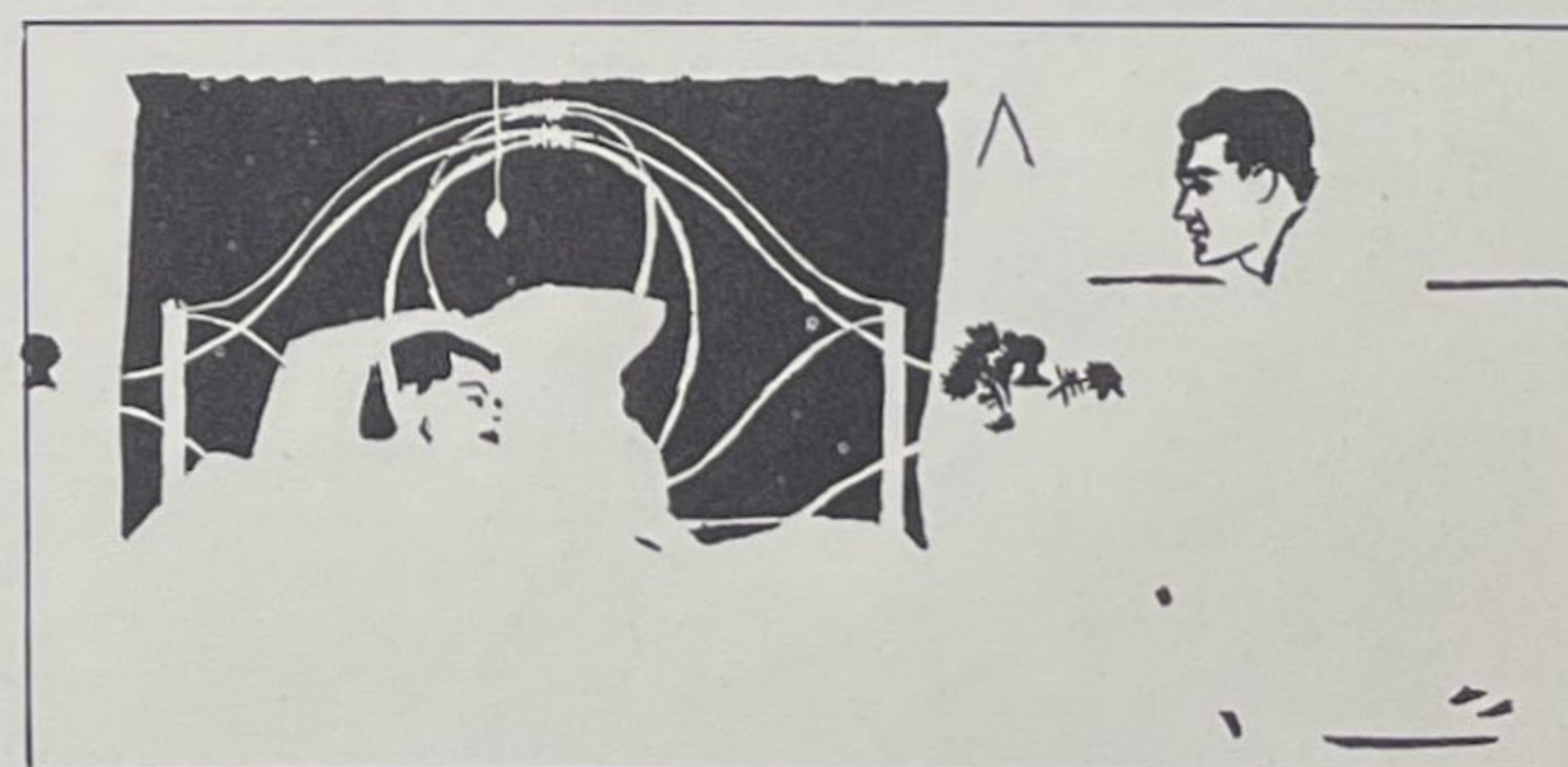
The white shapes.



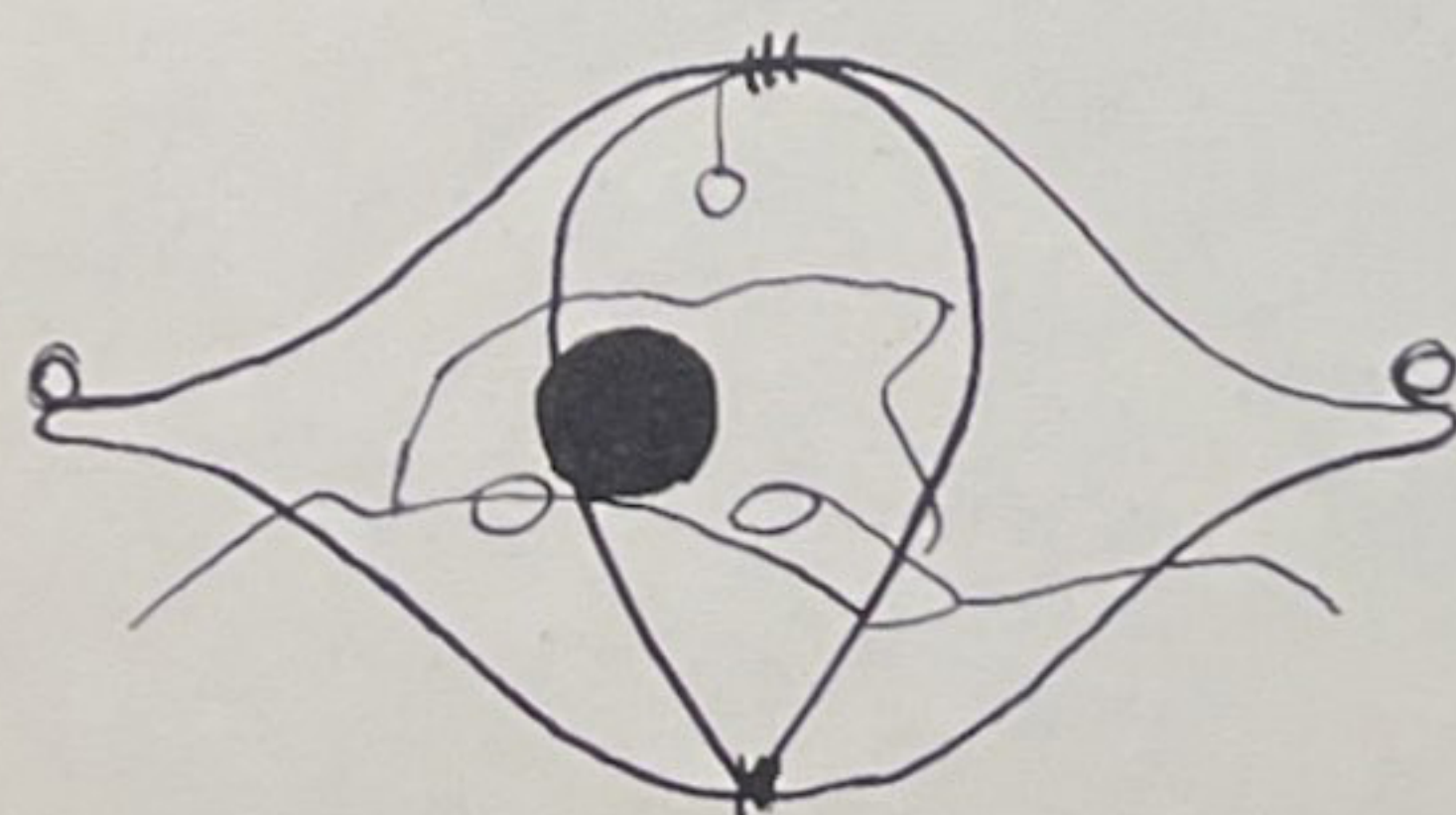
The lighter tone shapes.



The middle tone shapes.



The darker tone shapes.



The center of interest.

Al Parker shows how to establish the center of interest in composing an illustration.



## Mood in composition - *Stahl*

Here are a few of the basic symbols used to establish the mood or disposition of a picture. Many other elements besides these symbols are important in establishing a picture's mood. Color, tone, edges, the composition and the physical objects represented all contribute to a picture's mood. But the basic symbols shown here are starting points and their use in various mood pictures is easily seen.

An illustration is a combination of a number of these mood symbols. An example of this can be found in the sketch called "Despair" in which we have the drooping forms of despair and sadness combined with the symbol of mystery, the symbol of calmness and the symbol of dignity. All these forms augment and heighten the story told by the action of the figure or figures in the illustration. The symbols establish the mood; the action, locale and props tell the immediate story.

These symbols are not to be used like a chart. If you try to do this, you will become mechanical in your feeling toward mood. Think of these symbols as you think of a color wheel — something to look at, study and then throw away. These diagrams are merely a breakdown of the elements that create mood. They definitely do not reflect my way of creating mood. My method can be stated simply: I feel the mood of a story and through feeling and technique, transfer that mood to the picture space.



*Intimate — mystery, rhythm, excitement*

Naturally, the subject matter of an intimate picture has much to do with the creation of an intimate mood. It is also necessary to use symbols of intimacy in conjunction with the subject matter both to create unity and to make the mood more instantly felt by the observer. Notice how the forms of the drapes seem to "wrap around" the figure of the girl. The mood is sensuous and warm and therefore all the forms must be soft and yielding except those few necessary straight and angular forms used for contrast. Soft, round forms are made to appear softer and rounder when placed with contrasting angular forms. It is a matter of juxtaposition. For example, a gray is a dark gray when placed next to white. It becomes a light gray when shown with solid black. So, to heighten any mood we deliberately place some contrasting forms in it that are directly opposed to the mood we are trying to create. An example of this can be seen in the "Mystery" drawing where an area of sky is intensely lighted to contrast the gloom.



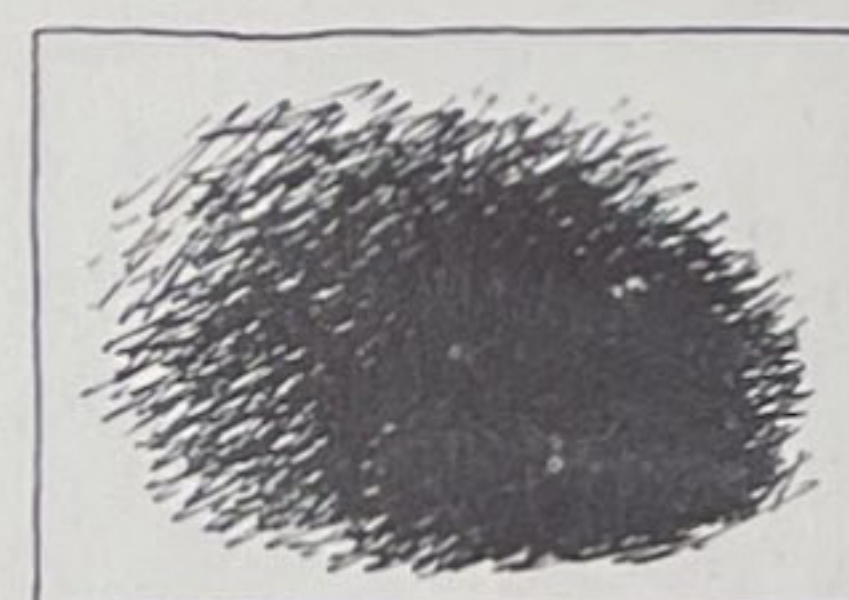
*Mystery — gloom, excitement, depression*

In addition to containing various mood symbols, this drawing has an array of strange and weird shapes that wriggle and squirm in a revolting sort of way. The scene, one of grave robbers at work, demonstrates how one can use props in a picture to increase the story telling aspect of the picture. For example, the tree branches seem like clutching hands reaching down into the half-opened grave. Due to their wriggling nature, the branches appear to be moving, to be alive. In mysterious pictures of this sort, the use of a black silhouette against light is tremendously effective.

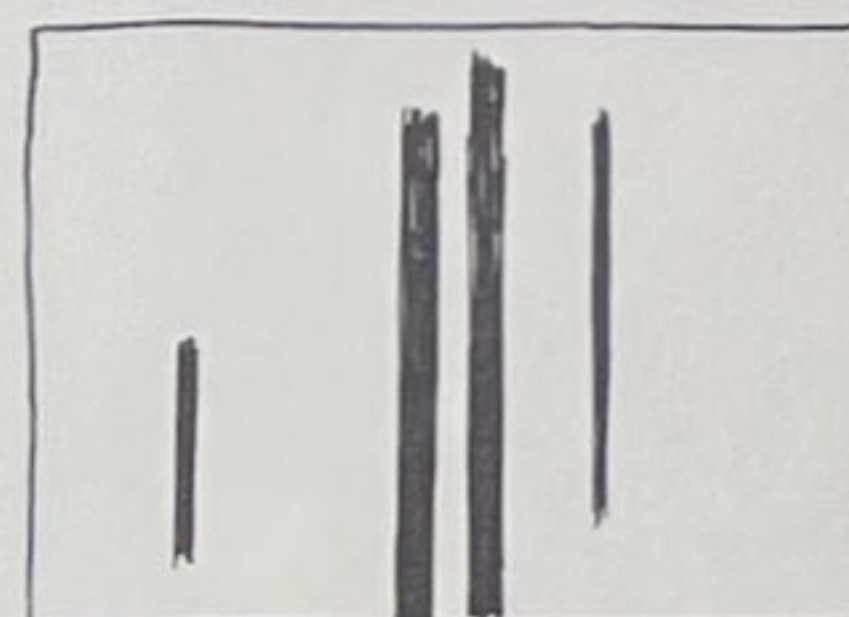
### *Despair — silence, gloom*

In the accompanying text I have explained the elements which make this picture look unhappy. I would suggest that you look around you and see how many of these mood symbols you yourself can find — there are, literally, hundreds of them.

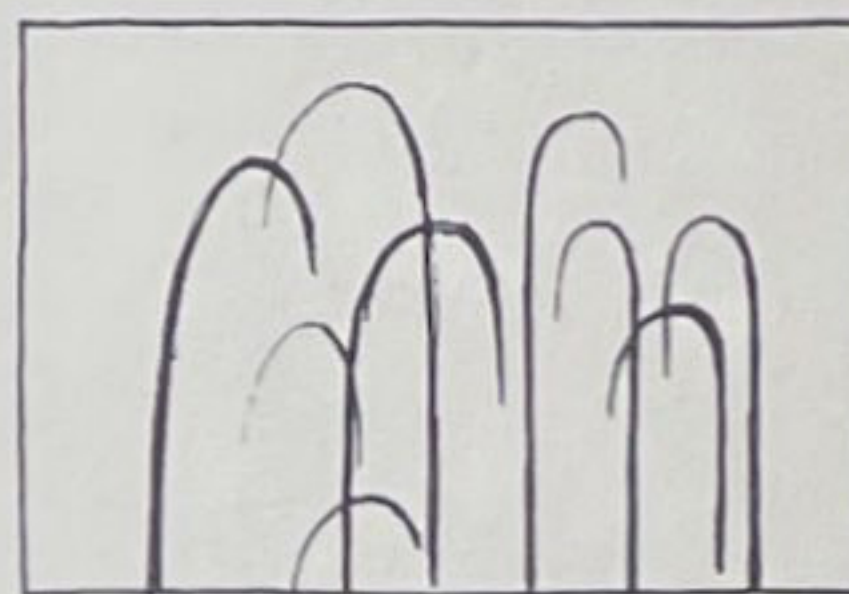
### Symbols of Mood



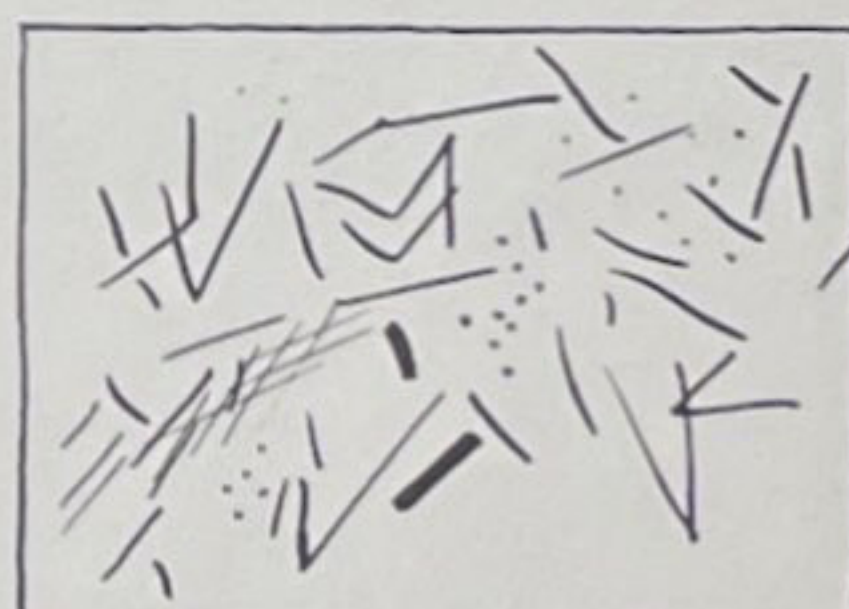
mystery  
gloom  
low in key



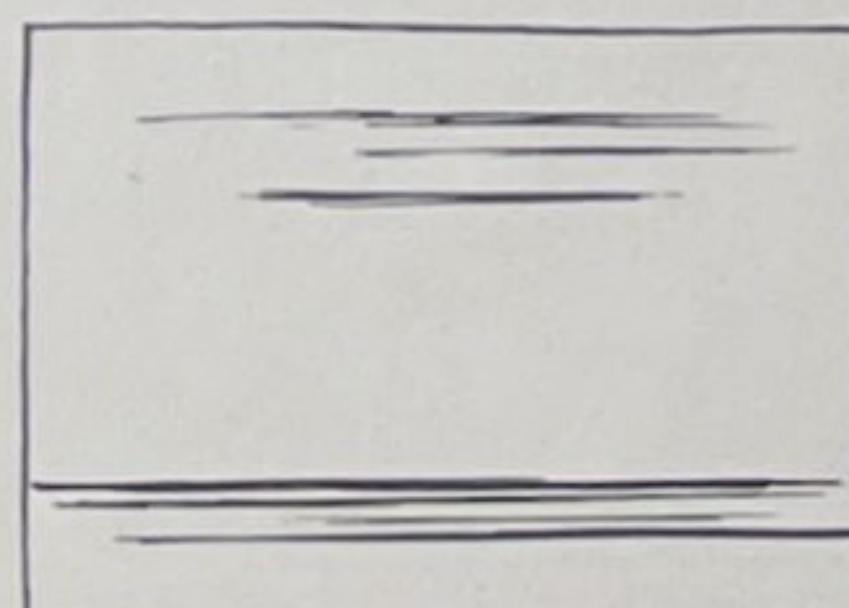
classic  
dignity  
awesome  
great



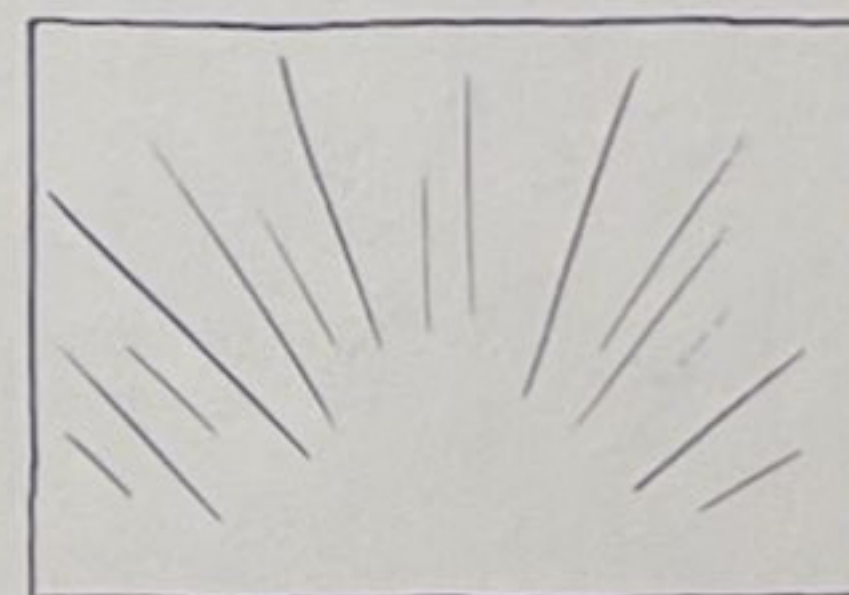
despair  
sad  
depressed  
drooping



excitement  
frivolous  
hysterical



classic  
calm  
quiet  
silent  
peaceful



hope  
happy  
glad  
hilarious  
bright



soft  
gentle  
rhythmic  
pleasant





**Excitement — mystery, hysteria**

To attain this mood of excitement and hysteria we renounce any indication of classical order. Everything is organized but with a concept in mind that is more pliable and loose. We find very few horizontals and verticals. Things appear jumbled and tossed around like straws in the wind. The forms, in an abstract sense, squirm and twist. The element of mystery (dark) is used, in this case, as wild, jagged forms twisted and bent, but in harmony with the figures. The picture creates a perverse effect.



**Hope — brightness, excitement**

Here I have combined the symbol for hope (happy, bright) with the symbol for excitement to create this mood. Notice that the arms of the larger figure repeat the rising lines of the sunrise motif in the background. In illustrative cartooning these sunrise lines create an effect of happiness and brightness.

**Calm (holy) — dignity, silence**

A calm, holy mood: The calm serenity of this pen drawing is based on two basic symbols — the horizontal line and the vertical line. The horizontal indicates calmness; the vertical indicates dignity, awe and greatness. All these meanings for the vertical and horizontal lines combine and contribute to a feeling of holiness. These two symbols are absolutely pure in shape and are therefore considered classic forms. In establishing a mood of this nature, the picture must have an orderly (classic) arrangement. It could be given an element of mystery by being painted dark (low in key). The purpose of this particular example is to demonstrate a mood with a minimum number of symbols.



**Dramatic —  
mystery, excitement**

In the case of the dramatic picture one must be extremely careful not to "over act" or become too corny. Such a mistake will occur if you make your figures do things that are not logical. A facial expression can be exaggerated (things must be exaggerated) up to a point and still be in good taste. In fact, let your taste guide your exaggeration. The only place where too much exaggeration is acceptable is in illustrative cartooning which is comparable to comedy or farce on the stage. You don't have to worry about over exaggerating the mood symbols, however. They can be exaggerated extremely and still be sound. In other words, symbols are not subject to the limits of exaggeration. Note how the broken effect of light through the railing creates vibrant excitement and adds to the action of the girl and man. A picture is a dead thing; we give it life and movement by the use of forms that throb and live.



### Mood in composition — HAROLD SCHMIDT

This is one illustration from a series of stories re-creating for us the task undertaken by a few cavalymen. It was to keep order in the vast expanse of our West. It is a record of lonely men who only occasionally varied the lonely, dragging days with violent action. This story told of an officer's last "Day of Duty" and his ride toward the railroad.

In this composition I wanted to create a mood of loneliness — of being alone with sun, air and space — when only the clouds seem to move — where he, though moving, was still the center of the world ringed around by flat horizons.

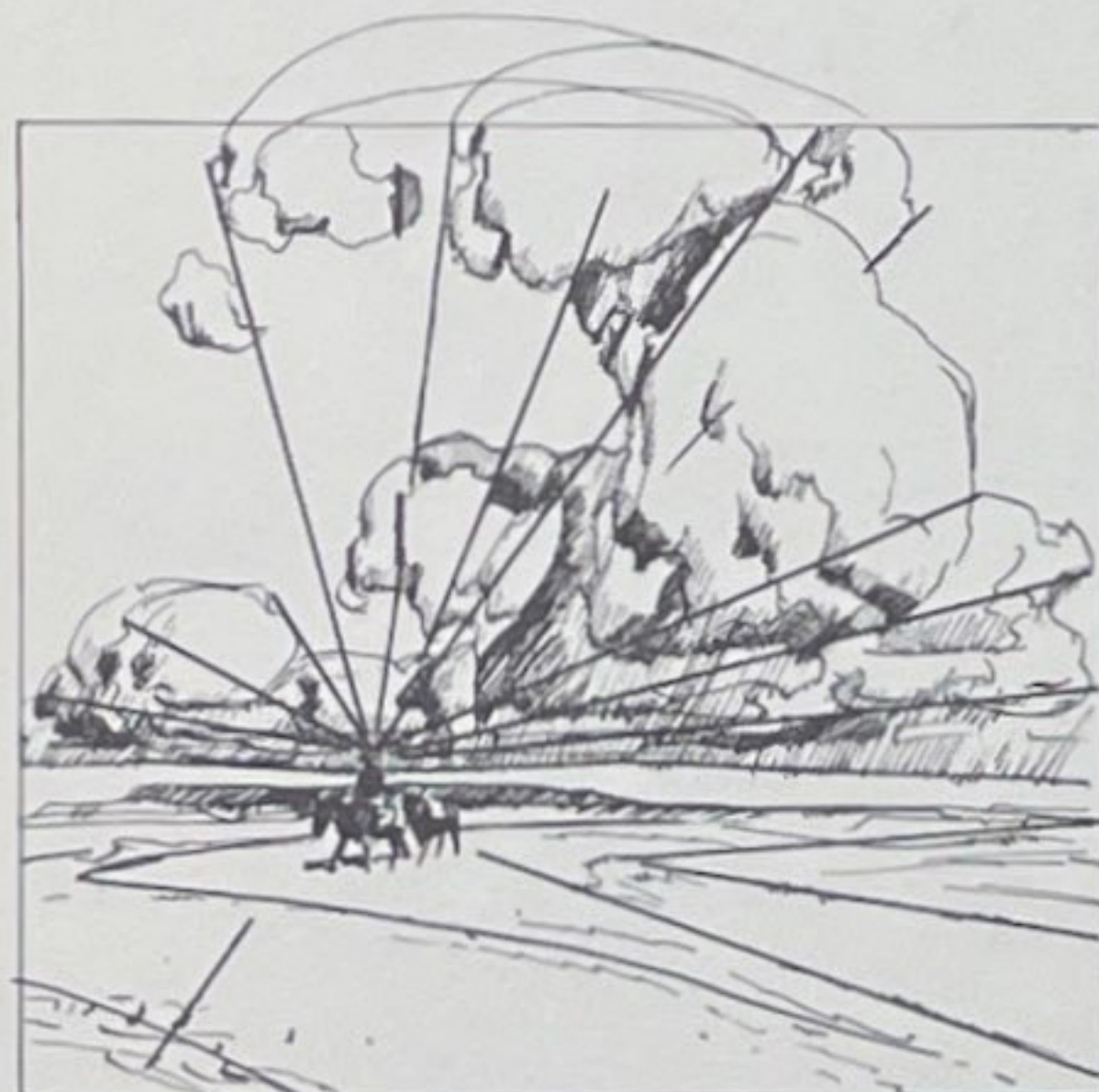
I tried to accomplish this by having the rider and animals move across the sweeping line of the clouds. I further opposed this movement by the road trace which crosses from the lower left to the lower right-hand edge of the illustration and with the small dry wash that cuts across the lower left-hand corner. I wanted to keep the country barren so I animated the sky

area with cloud shapes. These shapes are considered as carefully as components of the composition as was the figure group. Tone and color gave added depth and movement to them. The basic structure is shown in the accompanying diagram.

Notice that all major accents of line and tone point to the figure group. Note further that all major cloud shapes develop from a position above the rider's head. The strip of sky below the clouds joins with the line of the horizon to make a cross line with the rider, "x" marks the spot."

Converging lines hold the rider to a position in the canvas allowing the sweep of cloud movement to float to the right. This adds to the mood of spaciousness by slowing the movement of the figure group.

Observe how the long sweeping lines of the cloud movement turn your eye back into the picture.



By permission Saturday Evening Post © 1948 Curtis Pub. Co.





Courtesy The Barrett Division  
Allied Chemical & Dye Corp.

### Mood in composition—*Stevan Dohanos*

Any artist may one day be hired to haunt a house and *it may be you*. When this assignment is handed to you to achieve on canvas, how would you proceed to create such a mood?

Mood is a transitory state of mind or feeling affected by the emotions. You conjure up a series of images that haunt your memory and influence you at the moment. All of the senses react to external sources and influences. For example, your sensory nerves can react in many different ways to colors, sounds, smells and tastes. In the art of picture making, of course, we are only involved with the visual senses.

For instance, the blackness of night can inspire a mood of fear and apprehension which in turn can be completely dispelled by the warmth and security of sunshine.

The accompanying illustration, in which I have endeavored to create the mood of a haunted house for my client, utilizes several devices to increase the mood desired. Searching for an actual haunted house was not entirely practical at the time I did this assignment, although I did drive around the surrounding area for several hours looking for such a place. Eventually I was forced to sketch a house in good condition since it was the only type available, and adapted it myself.

I first selected a house with a mansard roof because that style of architecture lent a note of antiquity. I felt that it would heighten the mood of the painting to suggest architecture at least two or three generations old, thereby throwing the thought patterns of an observer conveniently into the past. I felt that it would add drama to my picture to show this house abandoned, neglected and in an isolated position. The weeds and grass should overrun the place with the elements having

taken over completely. The results therefore, would be one of general decay, a forbidding, "no trespassing" atmosphere. The other mood-heightening devices which I felt it necessary to inject were:

A Widow's Walk atop the roof which suggests the long, lonely waiting of the separated spouse.

Scarred and wind-swept trees that in their very stylized form suggest arms and hands outstretched in horror.

The fallen limb to suggest the force of the winds.

The loosened and banging shutters with one of them having fallen to the ground.

The weathered and decayed clapboard and the fallen roof tile.

The nearby graveyard to lend the ominous quality of departed spirits.

The bats flying around the chimney.

All of these devices were then dramatically shown in one vivid flash of lightning before being plunged again into total blackness. Black and white was sufficient for color on this painting since an average person would not be conscious of any other colors in such a situation. The house, therefore, was composed from detailed sketches of several buildings. The trees were sketched at another place and re-designed to fit the space and allow the house to be prominently and compellingly displayed. Of course the mood created in this picture is one of the most extreme an artist would attempt to paint and the symbols and devices are obvious. However, this illustrates, by using standard, heightening devices, how you can create mood in any given situation be it gay or somber. Remember to capitalize on the chain of images that the basic subject inspires within your mind.



### Vignette and action



Here is a beautiful example of composing many forms and shapes on white space. Notice how Mr. Parker has balanced the areas and controlled their points of contact.



AL PARKER

Courtesy Ladies' Home Journal



Violent action caused by opposing lines and directions of movement increases the effectiveness of the fight action in this picture.



FRED LUDEKENS

Here, vignette and action are well contained within a given picture area. Note how the picture space is held together on each side.



FRED LUDEKENS



Study the manner in which all the figures overlap the refrigerator. This is a good example of how to "hold together" vignetted groups. Note also how the points of contact of the forms are controlled.



Courtesy Frigidaire



ALBERT DORNE

← A fine example of vignette and action. Study the manner in which Mr. Briggs has utilized the shadows to heighten the action, especially those in back of the miniature coach. Note also that there is a slight "pitch" to all the elements that adds to the excitement and mystery.

AUSTIN BRIGGS



Study this picture for points of contact and the balance of forms and areas.

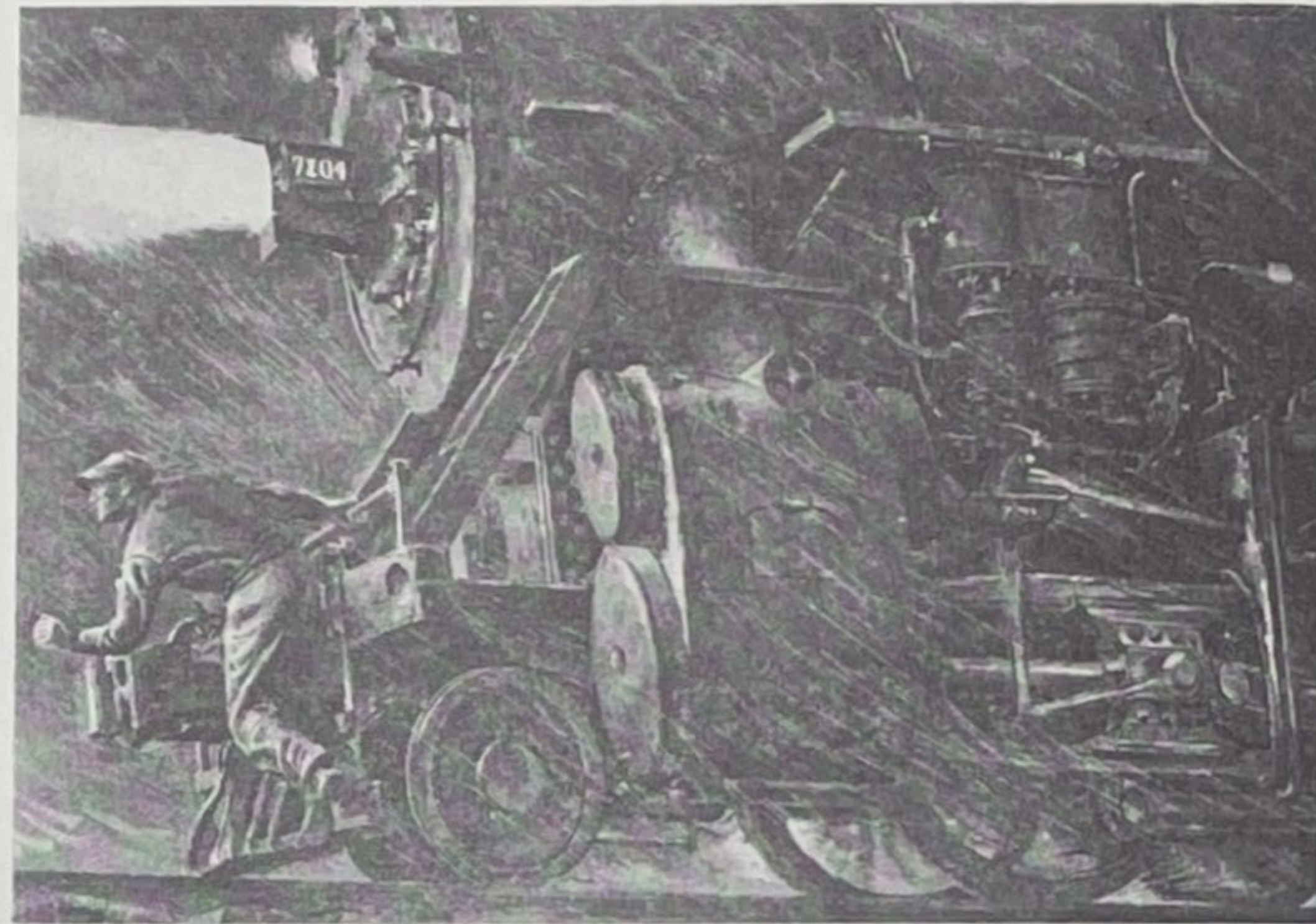


ALBERT DORNE

Courtesy Westinghouse Electric Corp.



Drawing the forms in this picture at a slightly oblique angle created a strong feeling of forward movement and action.



PETER HELCK

By permission Saturday Evening Post © 1948 Curtis Pub. Co.

## Vignette

A picture which is not bound by a border or a given geometric shape, is called a vignette. However, *the same rules of composition* apply to vignette pictures as to all others. When composing a vignette, it must be remembered that you are working toward the balance of an area, rather than in the proportions of a given shape. While the outside edge of a vignette can be quite irregular in shape, it must be *carefully designed* and not allowed to "run off" in all directions. Its effect should be rather a simple, over-all shape.

The vignette is of enormous value in magazines, advertising layouts, books and in fact almost every form of printed matter. It gives the page a lively and interesting look by the flexibility of its over-all pattern and infinite design possibilities. A great asset of the vignette is its adaptability to type design.



There is no question about the location of the center of interest in this vignette.



Here is a composition of figures on a white background. Study the manner in which the figures are held together by overlapping them and using the tree to keep the entire mass unified.

FRED LUDEKENS

TUDOR PUBLISHING



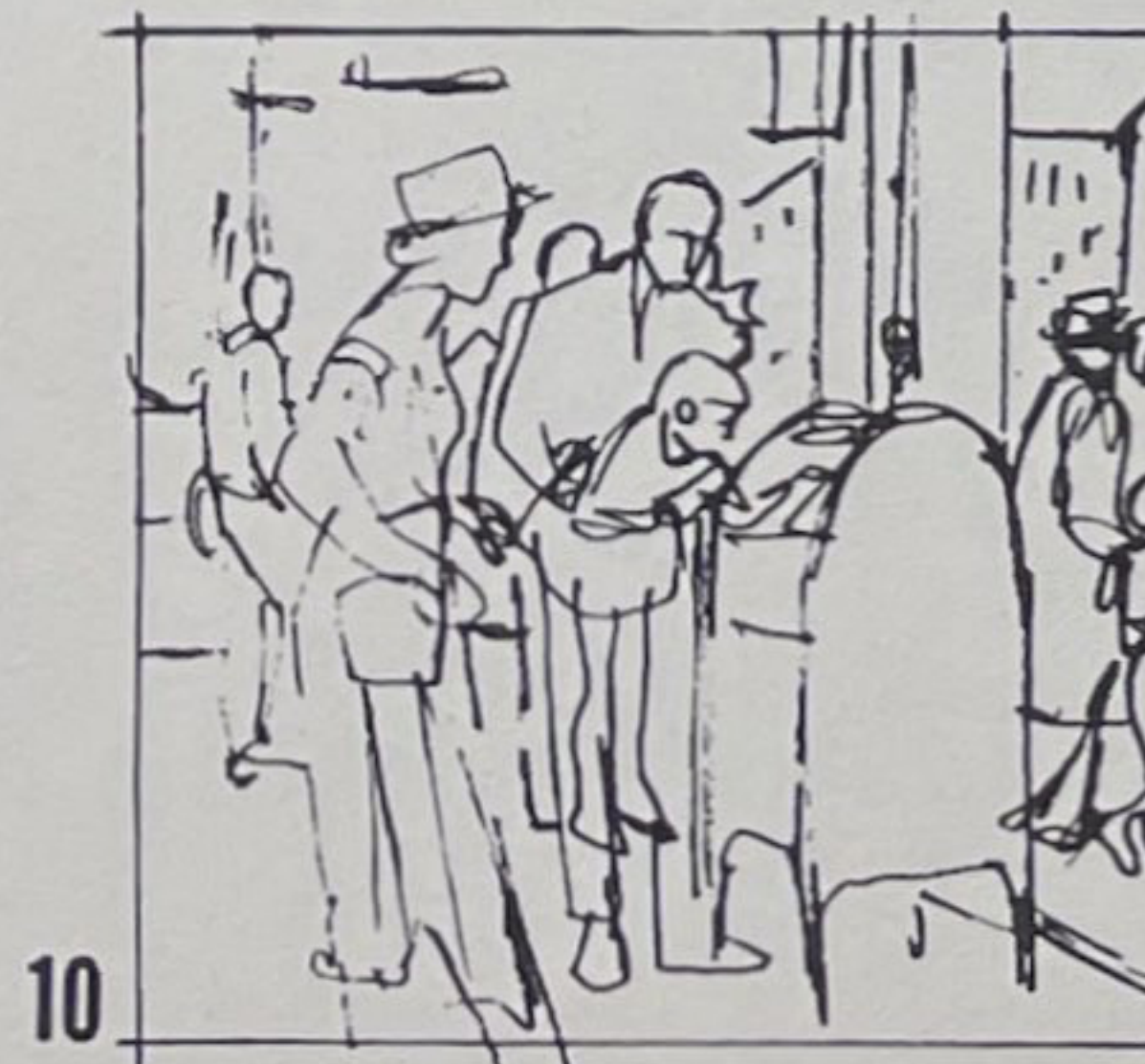
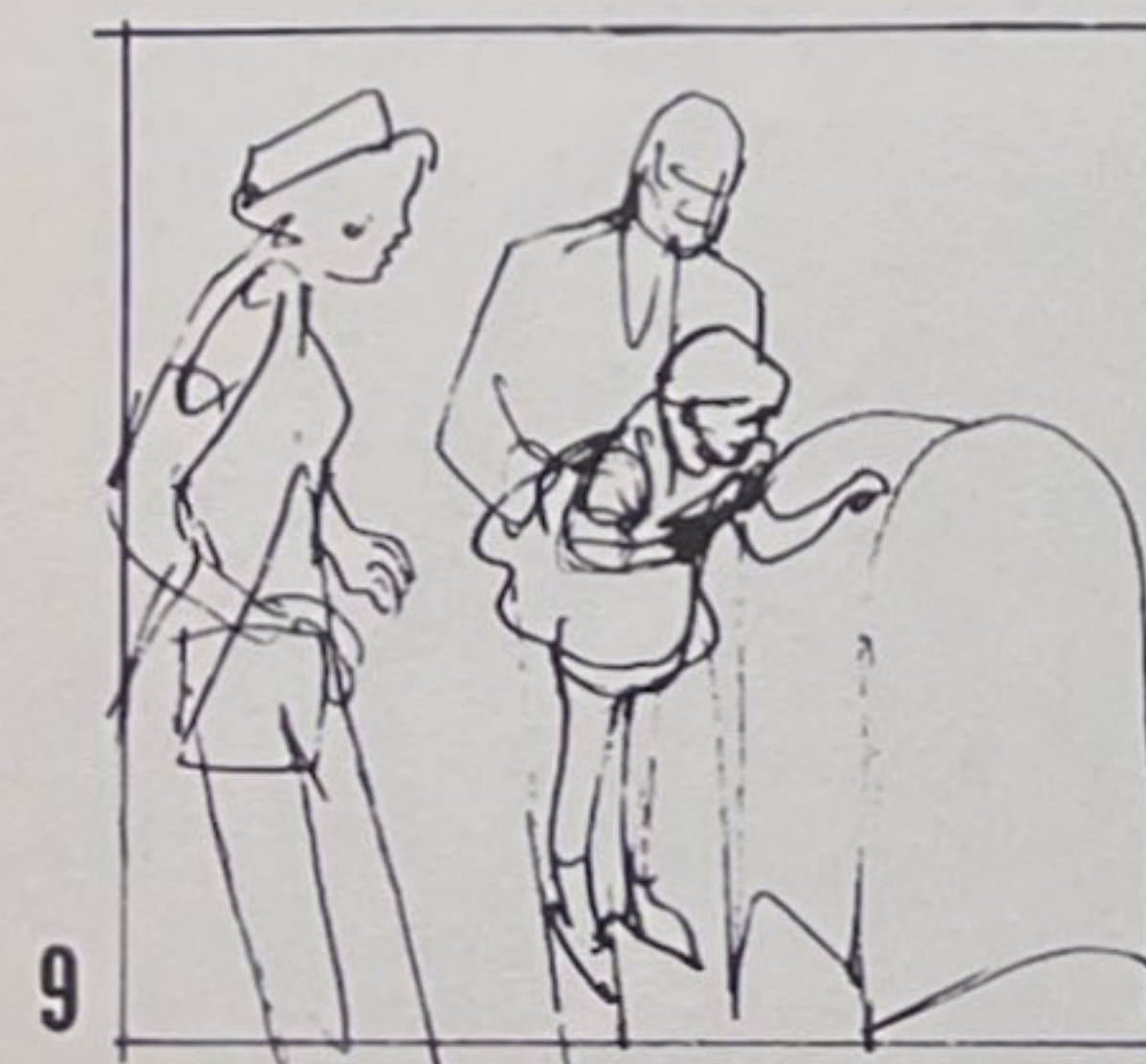
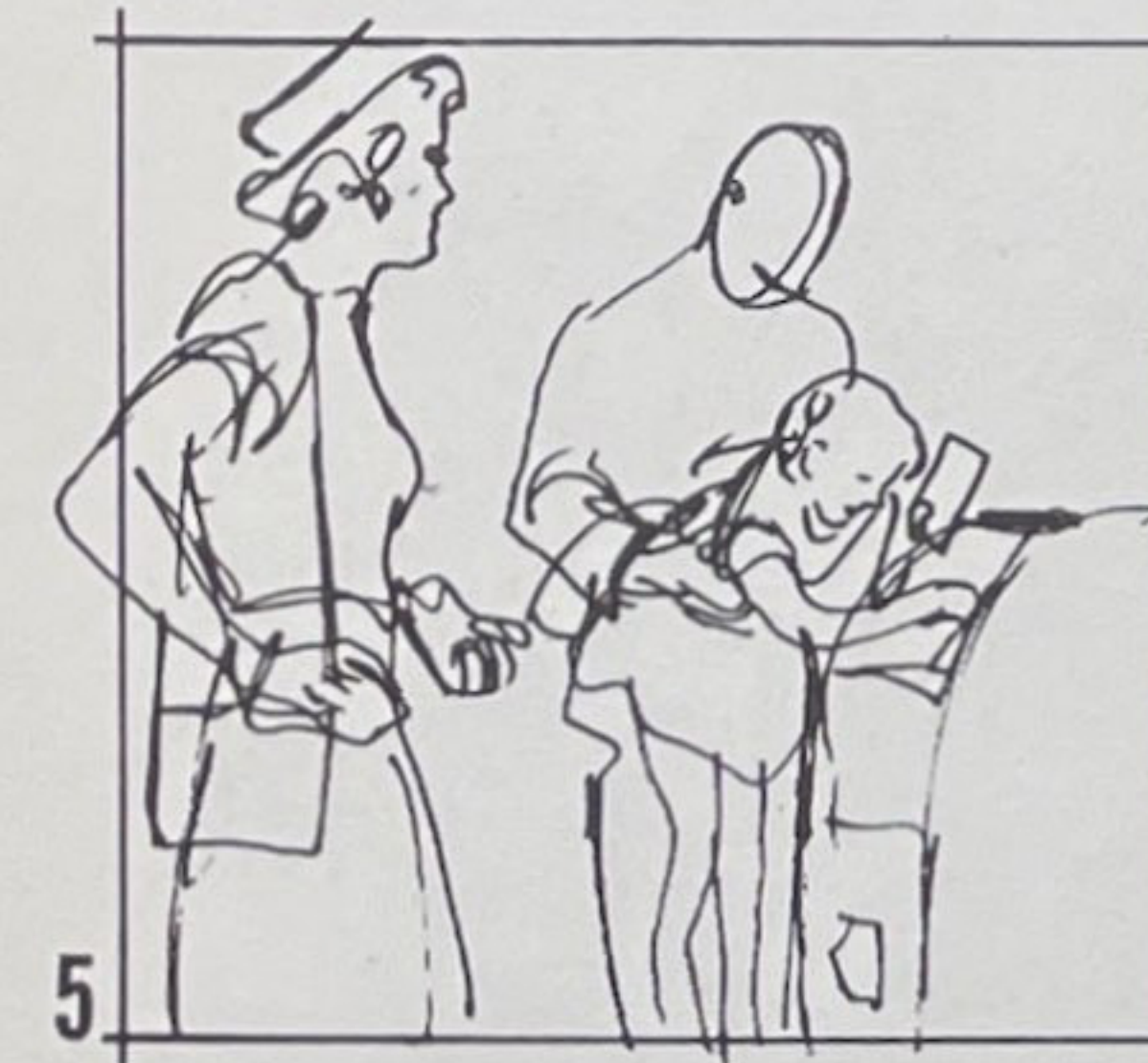
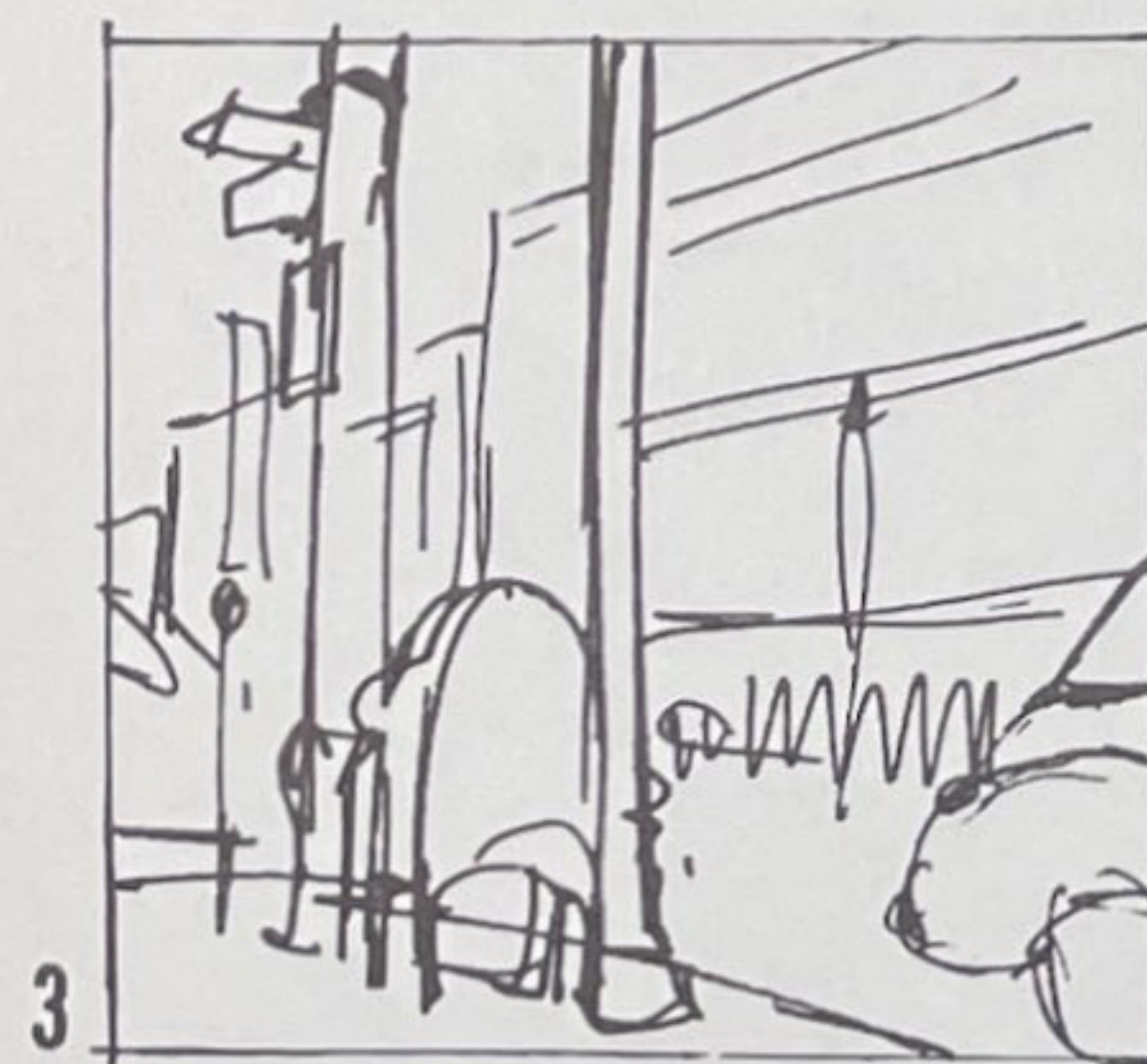
ALBERT DORNE



Courtesy Sanka Coffee

In both these compositions the eye is automatically drawn to the coffee by the control of space as well as the use of objective rhythm in the forms.



Composition of an advertising picture - *Quata Briggs*

As one of a series of paintings for American Airlines, the art director asked me to illustrate the headline, "Do your letters travel better than you do?" Unlike most advertising clients, American Airlines does not require me to follow an advertising agency art department layout. I am merely given a headline and am expected to illustrate it in a way that will make it a successful advertisement.

Having used my New England habitat for backgrounds in the paintings preceding this assignment, I took advantage of a lecture trip to Ohio to make somewhat different background sketches for this job. Sketches 1, 2 and 3 were made on the spot in Dayton.

As soon as I read the headline, I decided to show a young mother and father letting their small child post an air mail letter. These Dayton sketches were attempts to find sufficient background color to support the more important story telling figures. By the time I got to the finished painting, nothing was left of them except the corner street sign and the traffic signal poles beside the mailbox. The sketches were not wasted however; they helped me get the "feel" of a busy, medium-sized town street.

It may seem strange that I chose to ignore the interesting background of buildings as I continued with this composition but I had a good reason. The open sky served much better in an air mail advertisement since the sky is the airplane's natural element.

I rejected sketch 4 even though the little girl's figure seemed graphic enough, because all the figures were seen in profile and that made the arrangement dull and uninteresting.

In sketch 5, I turned the man, who is holding the little girl up to the mailbox, toward the front, improving it slightly. I rejected this because the action of the little girl holding the letter seemed cramped.

In the next sketch I have readjusted the girl and the letter so that her action is more obvious but now the mother seems poorly related to the other figures.

Sketch 7 is the best so far, probably because I have moved back and shown the figures almost full length which relieves the cramped feeling in the first attempts. It was also a good idea because it shows quite definitely that the little girl is being held off the ground.

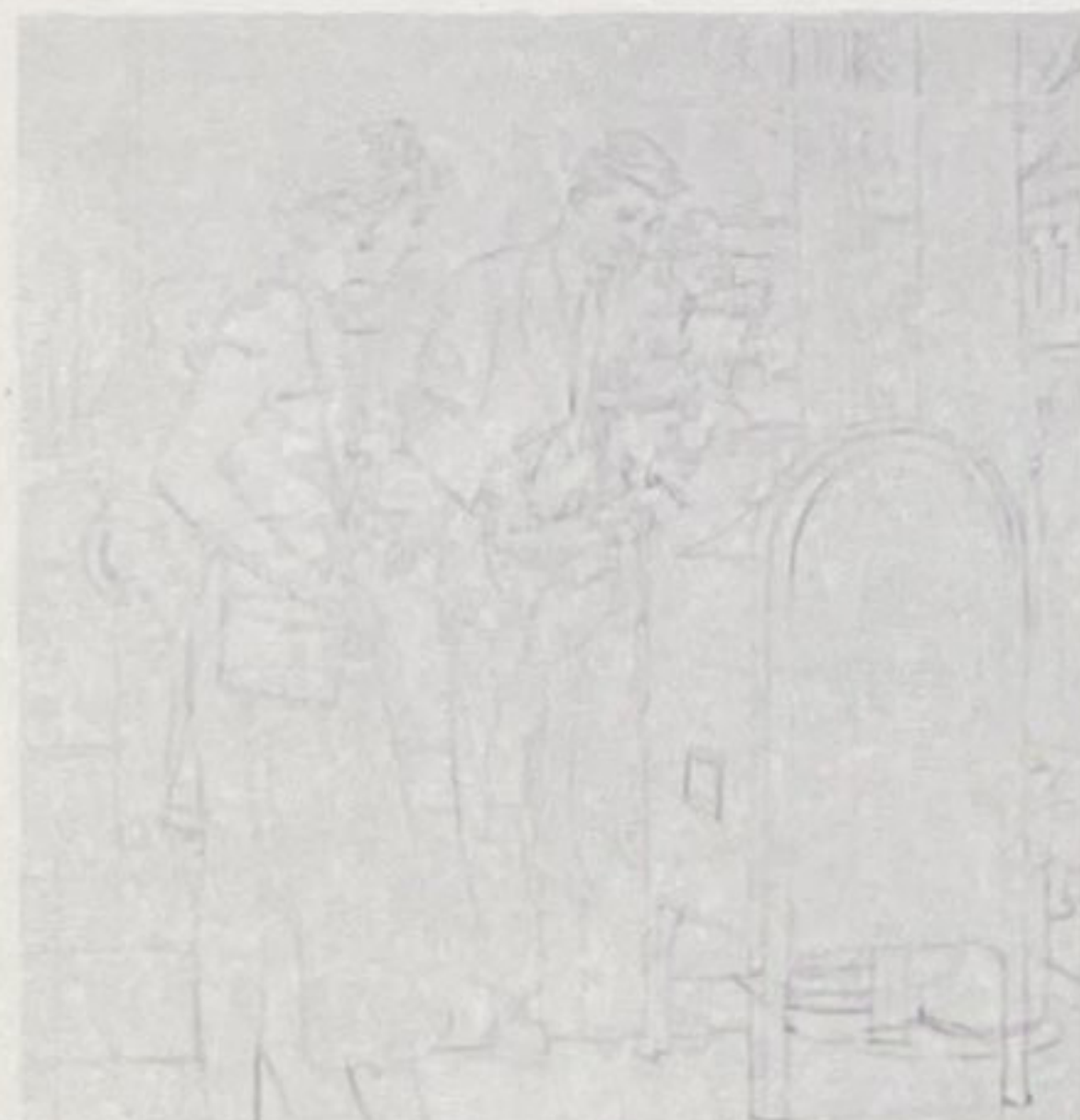
Sketch 8 is almost the best of the lot but I have made the same error of showing the figures in profile, as I did in sketch 4. However, the intervals between their heads have more variety and lead toward the important action of mailing the letter.

In sketch 9 I have turned the man so he faces toward you to give the variety I have been seeking.

Sketch 10 was my final rough. I had to move back and show the man's feet to clarify the girl's position. The American Airlines art director okayed this rough.



## A step by step development of the actual painting



1 Here is the finished pencil drawing done from photographs of models posed in accordance with my rough. Note how carefully I followed important shapes in the rough.



2 This is my initial painting step. In accordance with my customary procedure I have first painted that part of the picture which is deepest in space. Painting in this manner makes it easy to cause the forms to overlap each other as they come forward in the picture space.



3 In this step I have carried the picture further toward completion and one of the background heads is almost finished.



4 The background is quite complete although from time to time I changed some of the color and values which got thrown out of key by the addition of new colors and values in the foreground.



5 Here I have laid in the man's jacket and trousers which form a background for the key figure of the little girl and I have roughly laid in her head, arms and legs.



6 To indicate how broadly I paint, here are enlargements of the girl's figure showing two successive steps in painting the little girl.



7



8 I have abandoned the girl's figure for a time. I have finished the man's head and laid in the middle value of the mother's head and arm. This step and the next one are the best illustrations of my painting technique. I nearly always lay in a flat middle tone.



9 I have finished the mother's head, hat, arms and dress. Nothing remains to be done except finish the little girl's shoes and stockings, the man's shoes and the mother's gloves and bag — and the all important air mail letter.



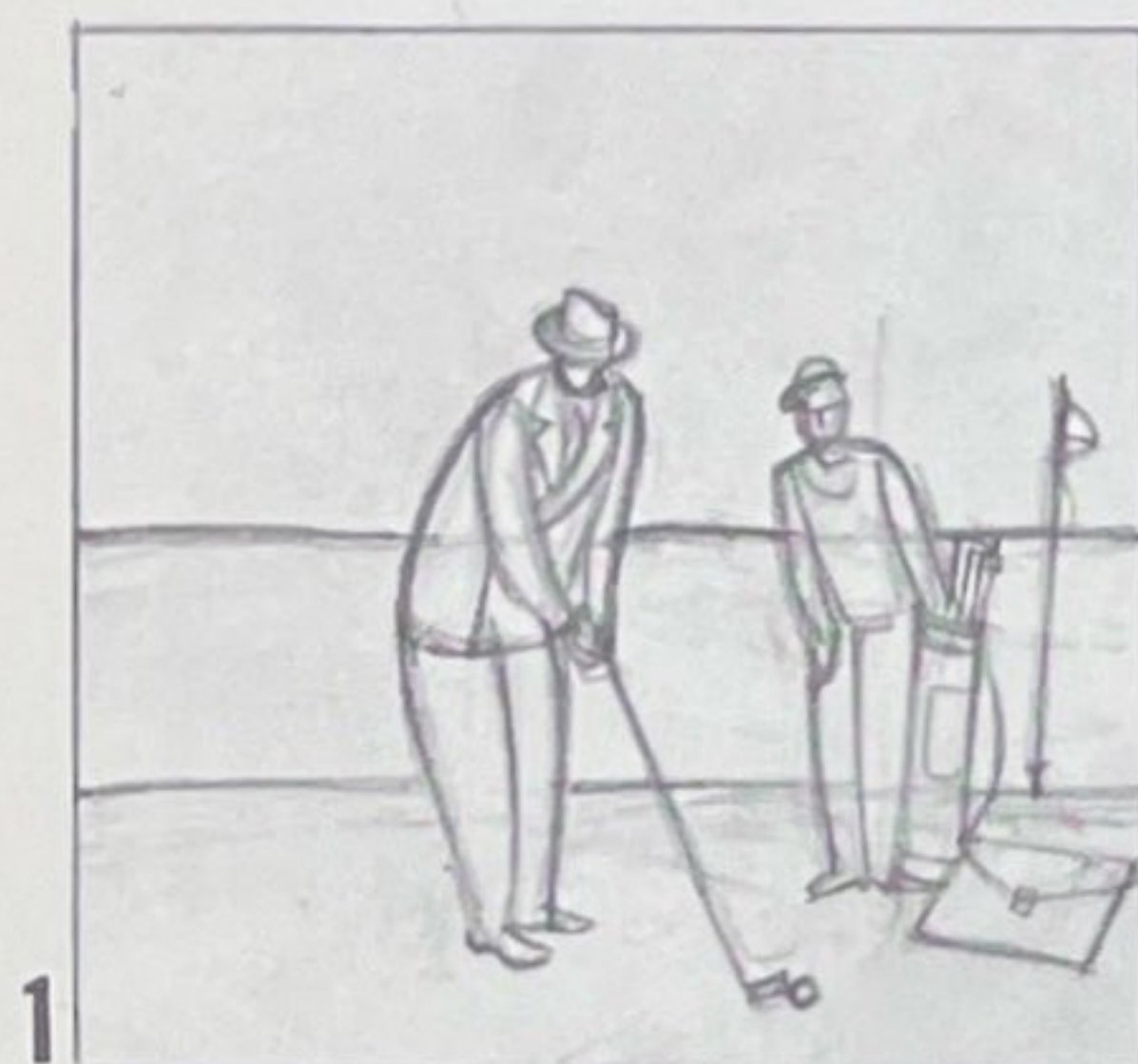
10 I now draw the characteristic features into that tone with a dark line. I blend the middle value and line together by modeling from middle tone to light and down from the middle tone to dark.



11 In this step I put the "U.S. Mail" sign on the mailbox and the painting is finished.

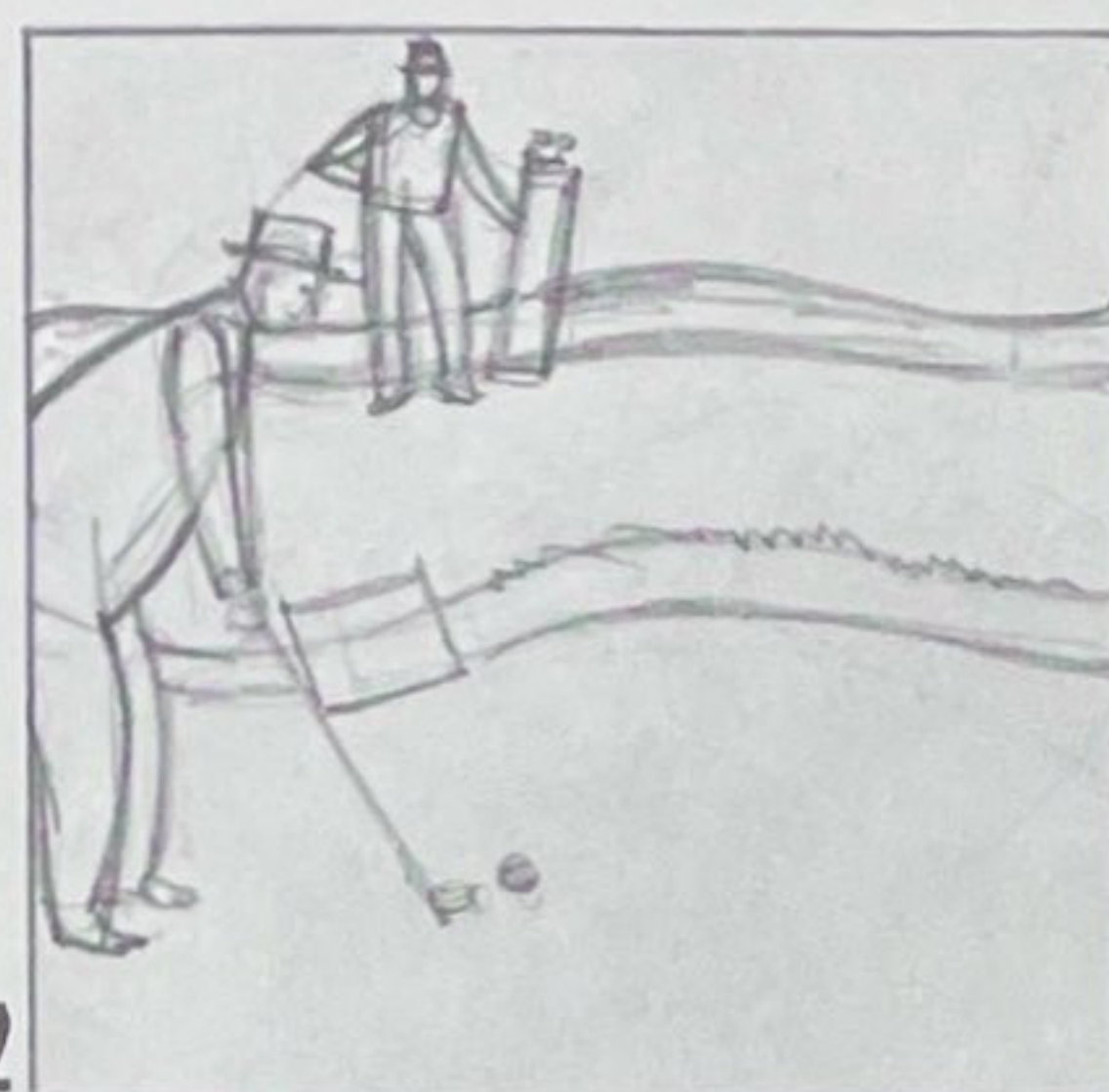


## Evolution of the composition



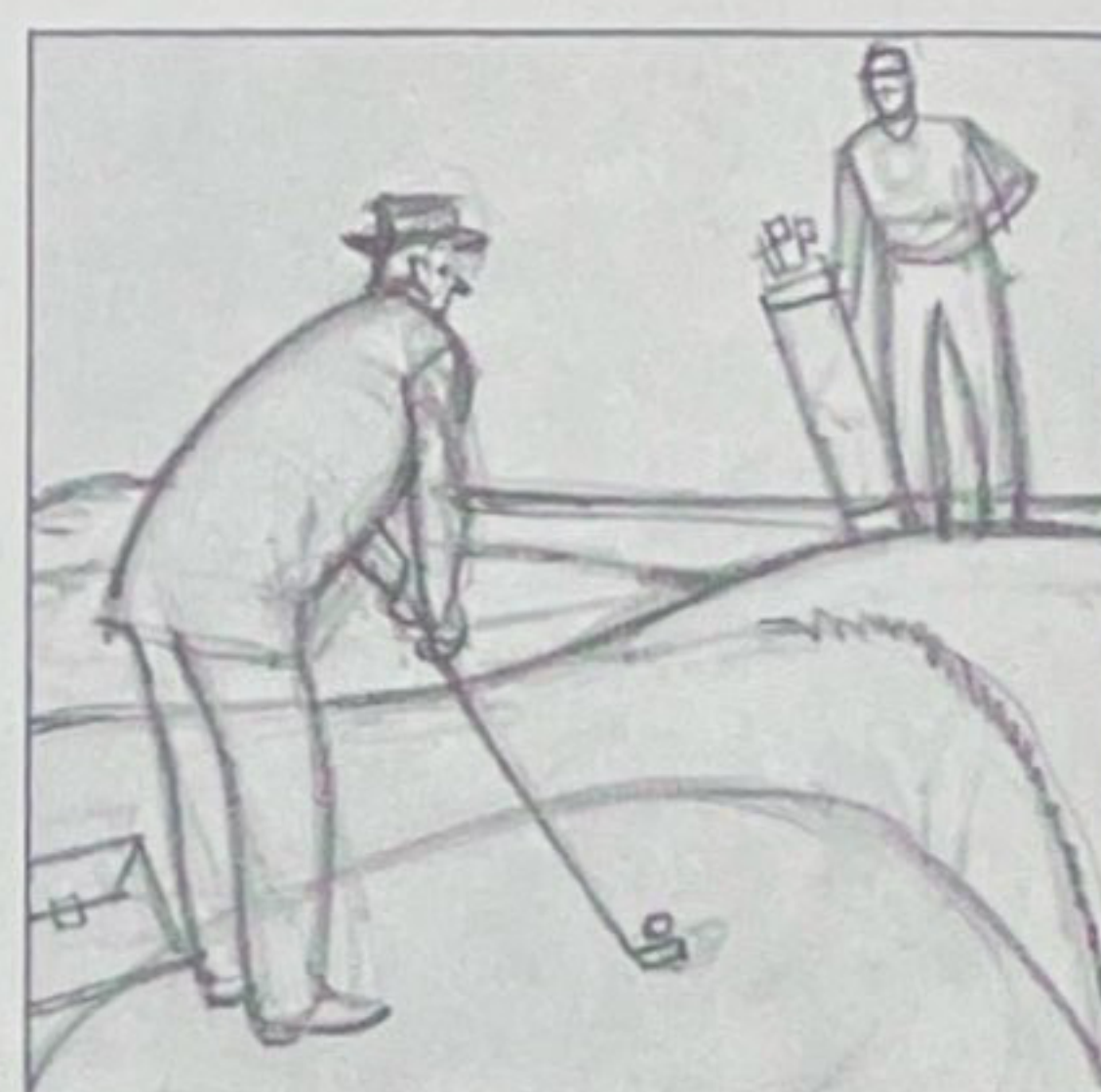
1

This first attempt was too static. The centered figure and horizon cutting the composition in half was much too dull. The caddy is too prominent and distracting.



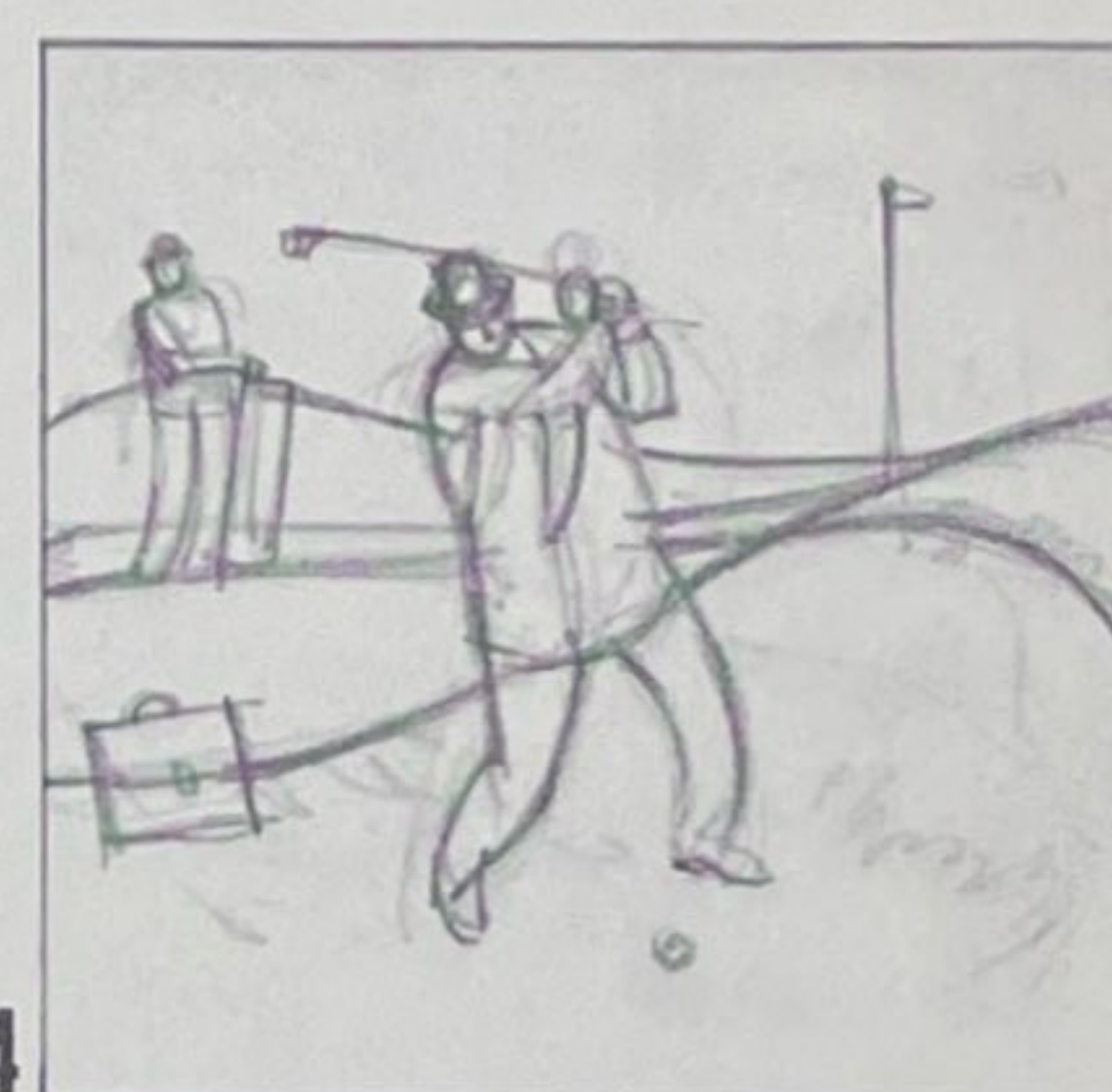
2

In this next effort, everything was pushed to one side of the area leaving a lot of uninteresting space on the right. The caddy seems to be holding up the picture frame with his head.



3

A three-quarter rear view of the main figure was tried for interest but it did not help. However, our landscape pattern begins to look a bit more interesting although the line defining the trap is drawing our attention to the lower corners.



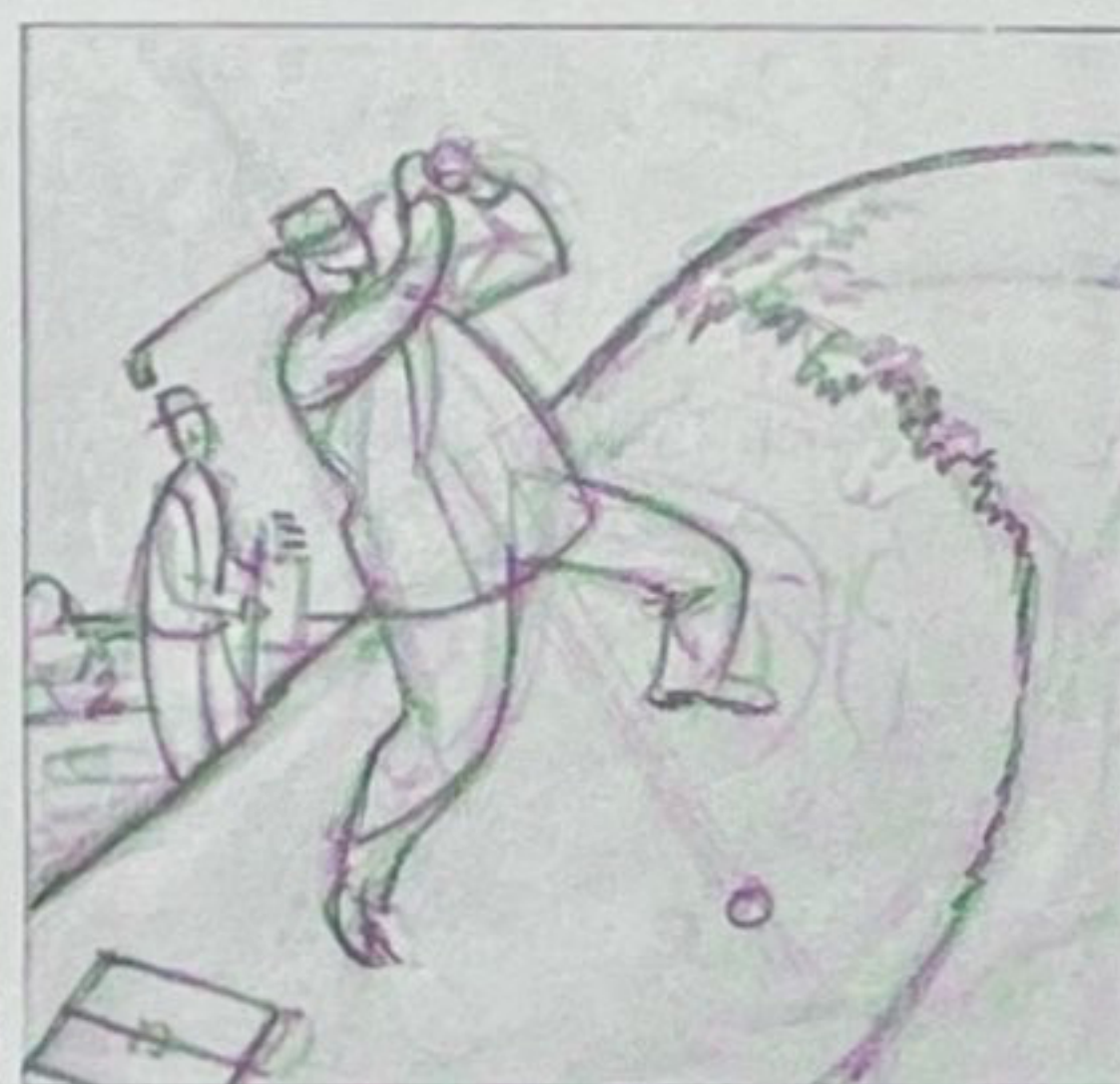
4

Turning the figure toward the observer adds interest but he is now back in the center of the picture area. This, along with the fact that the landscape pattern is creating tangents, spoils the try. However, the slope of the trap itself begins to suggest trouble.



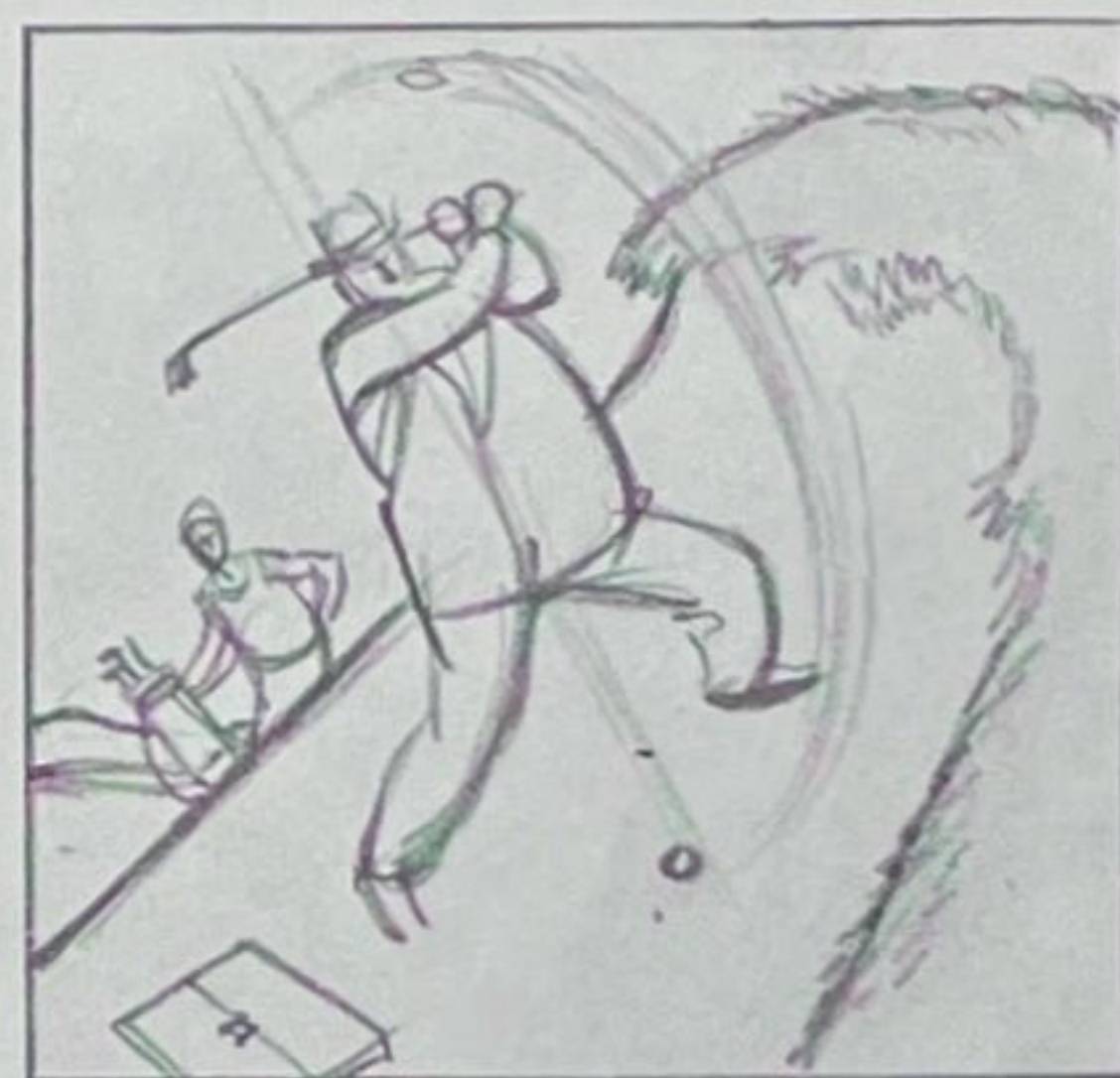
5

Taking a cue from the last sketch, we try a violent design with the golfer in a more exciting attitude. This try is getting somewhere, although the extreme angle of the trap suggests a mountainside rather than a trap. There is trouble in the corners here again.



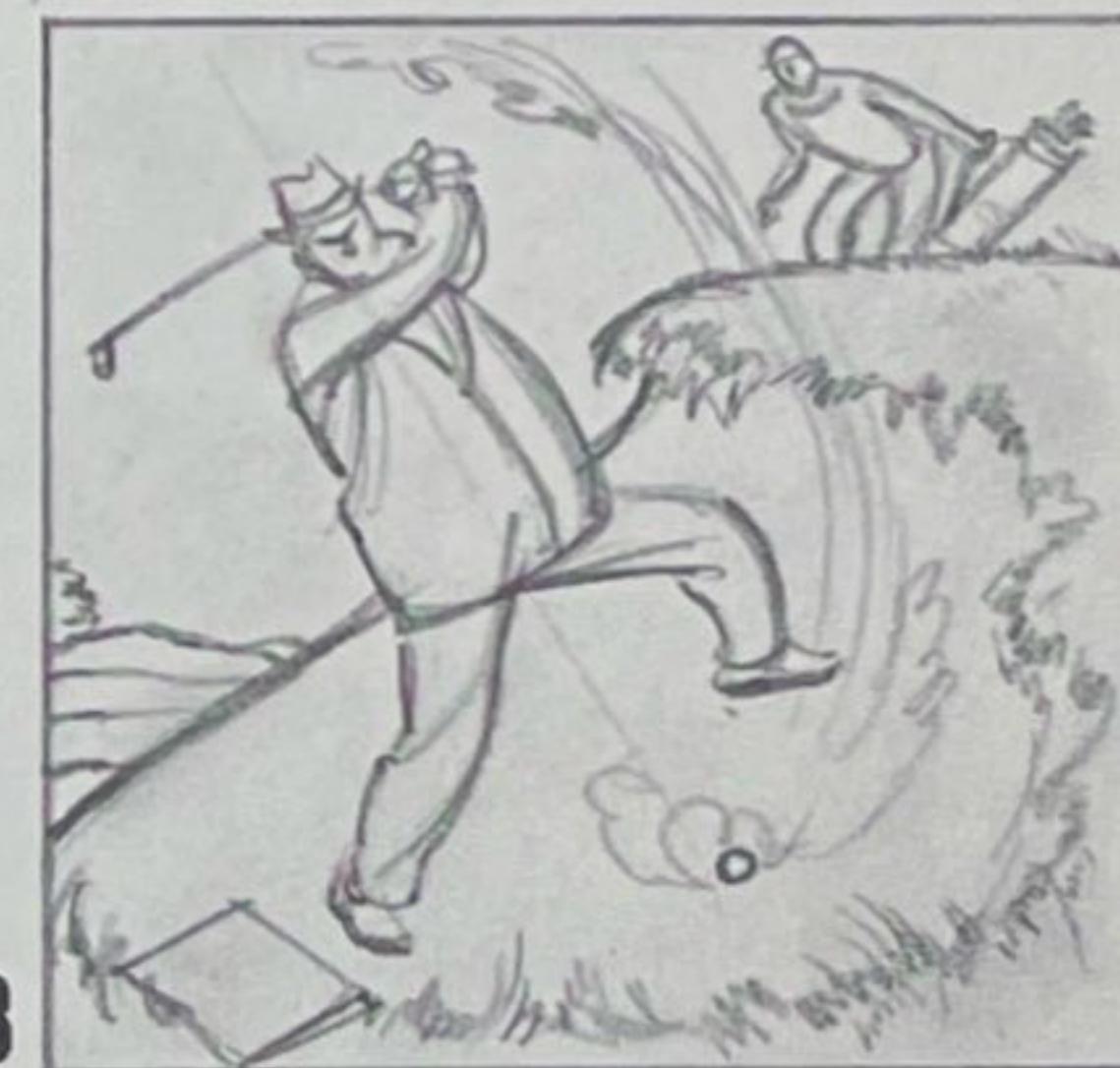
6

Lowering the line of the trap and avoiding the corners, we are now beginning to get some semblance of unity. Note that our golfer is now in the visual center of the composition. The brief case and the caddy are still badly planned.



7

Shifting the brief case a little gives us better balance. However, the straight part of the trap line on the right gives a feeling that everything is about to slide through the bottom of the picture. The caddy still appears to be in the wrong place.



8

In this new position, the caddy now balances the golfer. Note how changing the line of the trap so that it swings entirely around the bottom of the picture has unified the entire composition.



9

## Final composition

This is the finished composition. By adding some cloud shapes and suggesting the flying sand, we tie the caddy and the golfer together. We are now ready to make the finished drawing.

## Composing an advertising picture – ALBERT DORNE

The composition appearing on these two pages was one of a series of advertisements for American Airlines Airfreight which appeared in national magazines. The story concerned a golf ball manufacturer who found himself *trapped* by a serious production problem. A nearby source which had long supplied vital centers for these balls was unable to maintain delivery schedules and any delay in production might mean the golf ball maker would be "in the red" instead of "on the green."

The problem was to show the golf ball manufacturer in trouble and still tie the story up with the game. As the entire series of advertisements was in a humorous vein, it was decided to picture the business man in the sand trap – which, of course, represented trouble. The copy in the advertisement explained how American Airlines Airfreight helped the business man out of his difficulty.

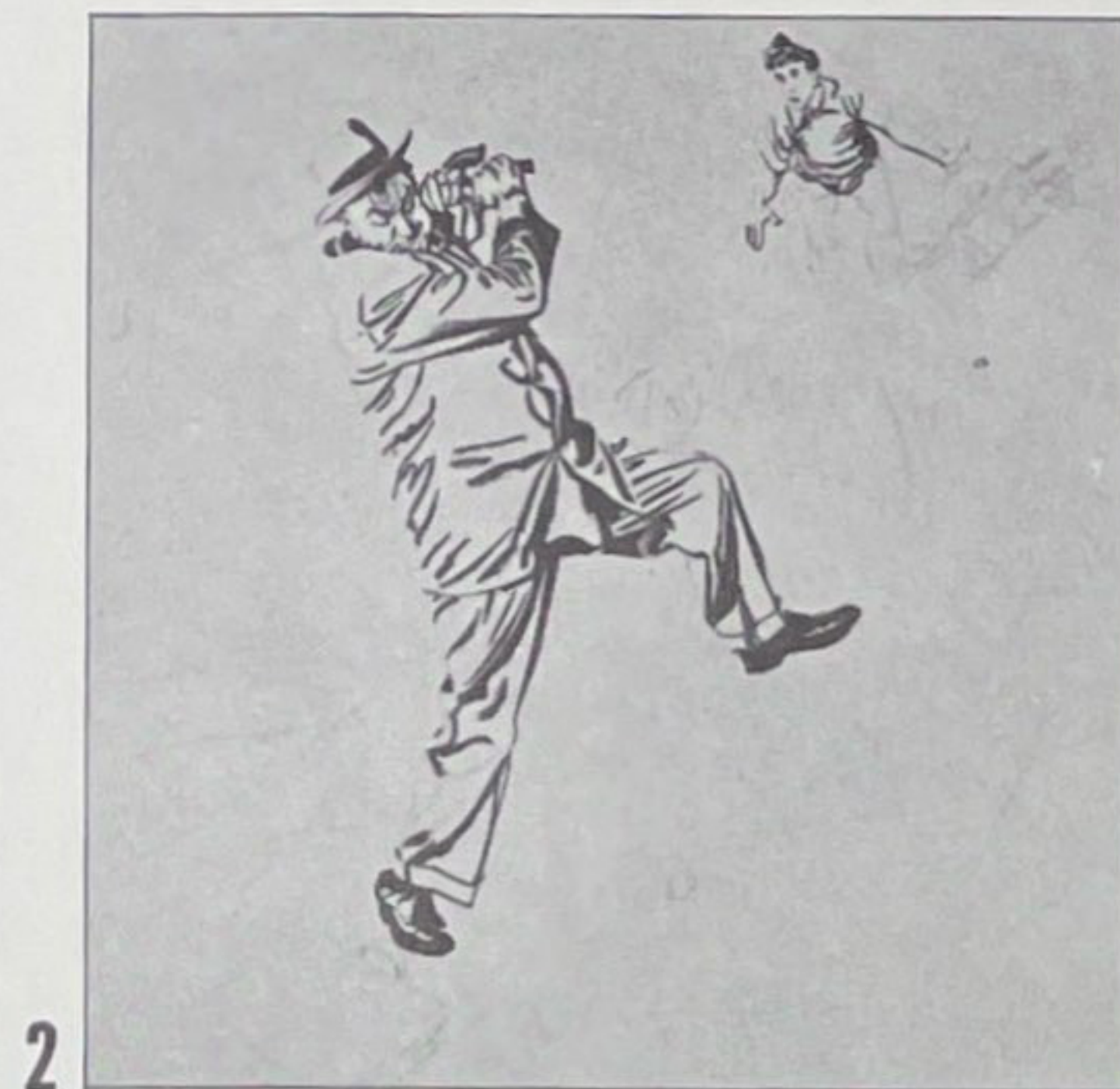


## Finishing the picture — step-by-step



1

The finished pencil drawing, which was done on tissue first, is shown here after being transferred to illustration board. It is now ready for rendering.



2

To establish my visual center and to control the tones, I begin by inking in the two characters first, using India ink.



3

Having completed the inking in of the figures I now put in the line of the sand trap to unify the design of the picture.



4

As the golfer is the most important element in the picture, I begin to paint him first so the rest of the tones in the picture will complement him.



5

The tones on the grass now begin to serve as a frame for the golfer and at the same time they tie the caddy into the design.



6

Here is the finished picture. Note that the addition of detail to the figures as well as the sand has not destroyed the essential design and unity of the composition. The gray tone of the sky completes the picture. The tones of the drawing were painted with India ink diluted with water.

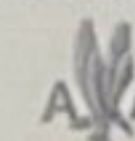


## Golf ball maker gets out of trap!

**ANOTHER AMERICAN AIRFREIGHT STORY**  
Last winter the maker of a popular line of golf balls, whose plant is located in the East, found himself trapped by a serious production problem. The nearby source, which had long supplied the vital centers for these balls, was unable to maintain delivery schedules. And any delay in production might mean the golf ball maker would be "in the red" instead of "on the green" this season.

Another source of supply was quickly located, but it was in the "latter" West. Question—could

deliveries be made in time to keep production rolling and at a cost that would keep price lines intact? Answer—American Airlines Airfreight delivered the centers twenty-four hours later at a cost so low that similar deliveries were continued. The golf ball maker is back on the "tee" now. You may be playing one of these balls this week-end.



AMERICAN AIRLINES Airfreight

This is but one of countless examples of how American Airlines Airfreight is benefiting American business. As a supplier or customer you cannot afford to overlook the possibilities of this modern means of delivery, as versatile as it is valuable. For free literature, write today to American Airlines, Inc., Cargo Division, 100 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York.

## The completed advertisement

7 The finished advertisement as it appeared in the magazines.



## Composition and pictorial design

Famous Artists Schools, Inc.



1

This was the first try. It seems too spread out and the man seems lost in a lot of office equipment.



2

This look-down view also loses the man. There seems to be no visual center and the typewriter is the center of interest.



3

Cutting this sketch in half both horizontally and vertically proved uninteresting. The attitude of the man suggests laziness rather than thinking.



4

The man's feet on the desk seems like a good "stopper." However, this picture contains the same faults as No. 3 — there are disturbing tangents — the man looks asleep.



5

Too much emphasis here is on bookshelves and desk rather than on the figure. This looks too architectural and we still don't have the right attitude in our hero.



6

A close-up of the man seems to crowd the picture. However, there is an idea here. We show the client's products on the desk and the subject's face.



7

The feet are back on the desk and the picture is opened out a little more. The client's products in the foreground give depth to the composition. The man's attitude seems good.



8

This is the composition we decide on. It seems to say frustration and clutter. We now refine our composition, making sure there are no tangents and that our space is well designed.



9

Here is the finished pencil drawing. We add the heavy book to strengthen the lower right corner. The overlapping of products in the foreground adds rhythm. The head is now at the visual center.



10

This is the finished picture. The design of space and the placement of the objects turned out well. The tones and values are good — and while there are many elements in the picture, your attention is held by the man's head.

## Same subject—many compositions

On this page we show you another composition in its step-by-step progress. The subject is an advertising writer who is having trouble getting an idea for his client's products which are piled up on his desk. The atmosphere is one of frustration and clutter — the man is obviously tired. In making pictures — the number of approaches to working out the composition on a given subject are enormous, and there are many ways of doing it that are good. The important point to remember is the selection of the right composition to fit the advertiser's specific problems — both for the message he wishes to get over and the publications in which the advertisement will appear.



## Analyzing an editorial illustration



Courtesy Good Housekeeping

The illustration analyzed on this page was done by AL PARKER. It was selected primarily because of its absence of excessive dramatic content. This picture depends, rather, on sound principles of design and composition to achieve its effect.



Rhythm in forms and . . . unity of forms.



Visual center and emphasis.



Lapping and placement of objects.



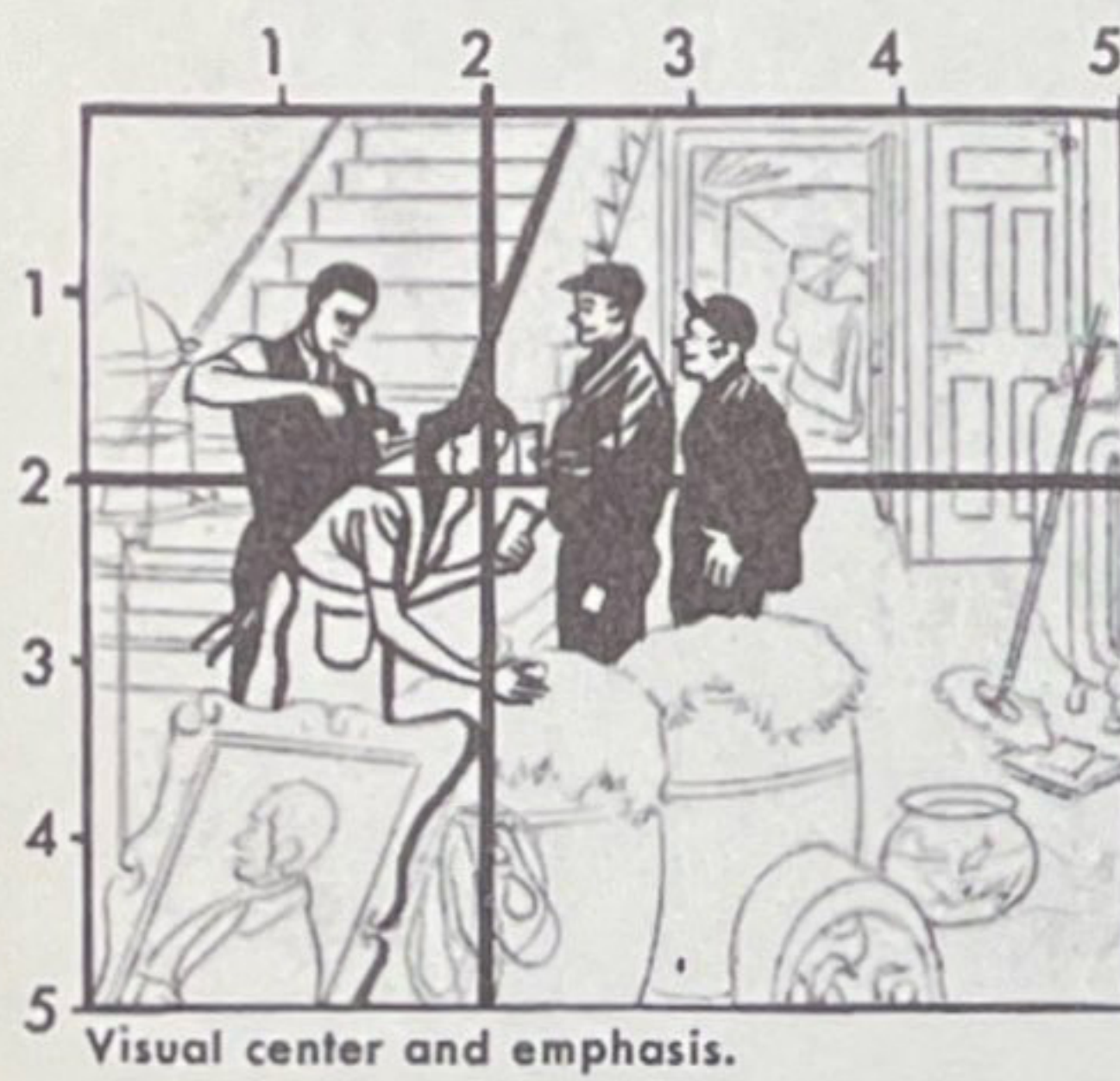
Balance of tones and harmony.



Design and space balance.

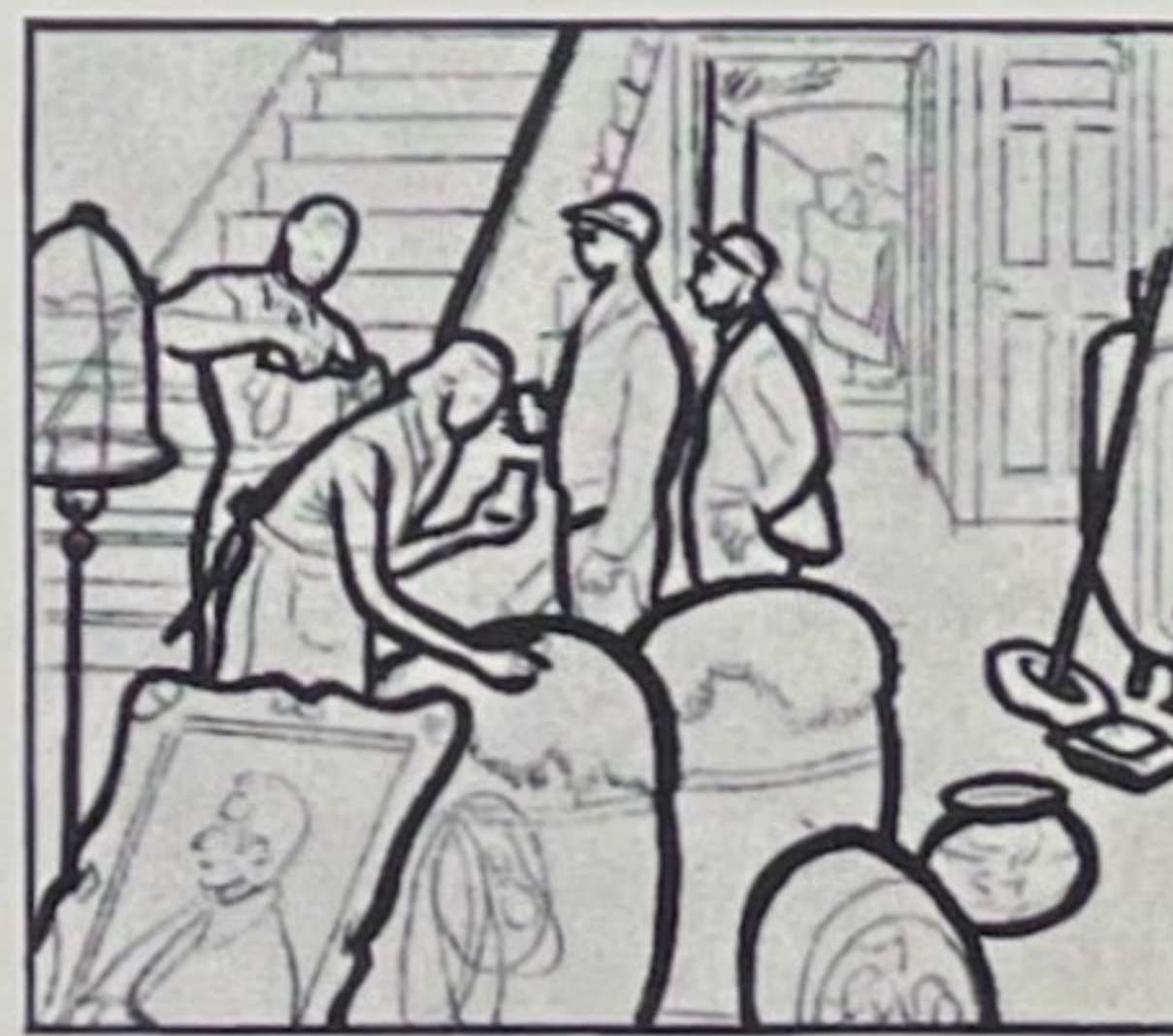


### Analyzing an advertising illustration

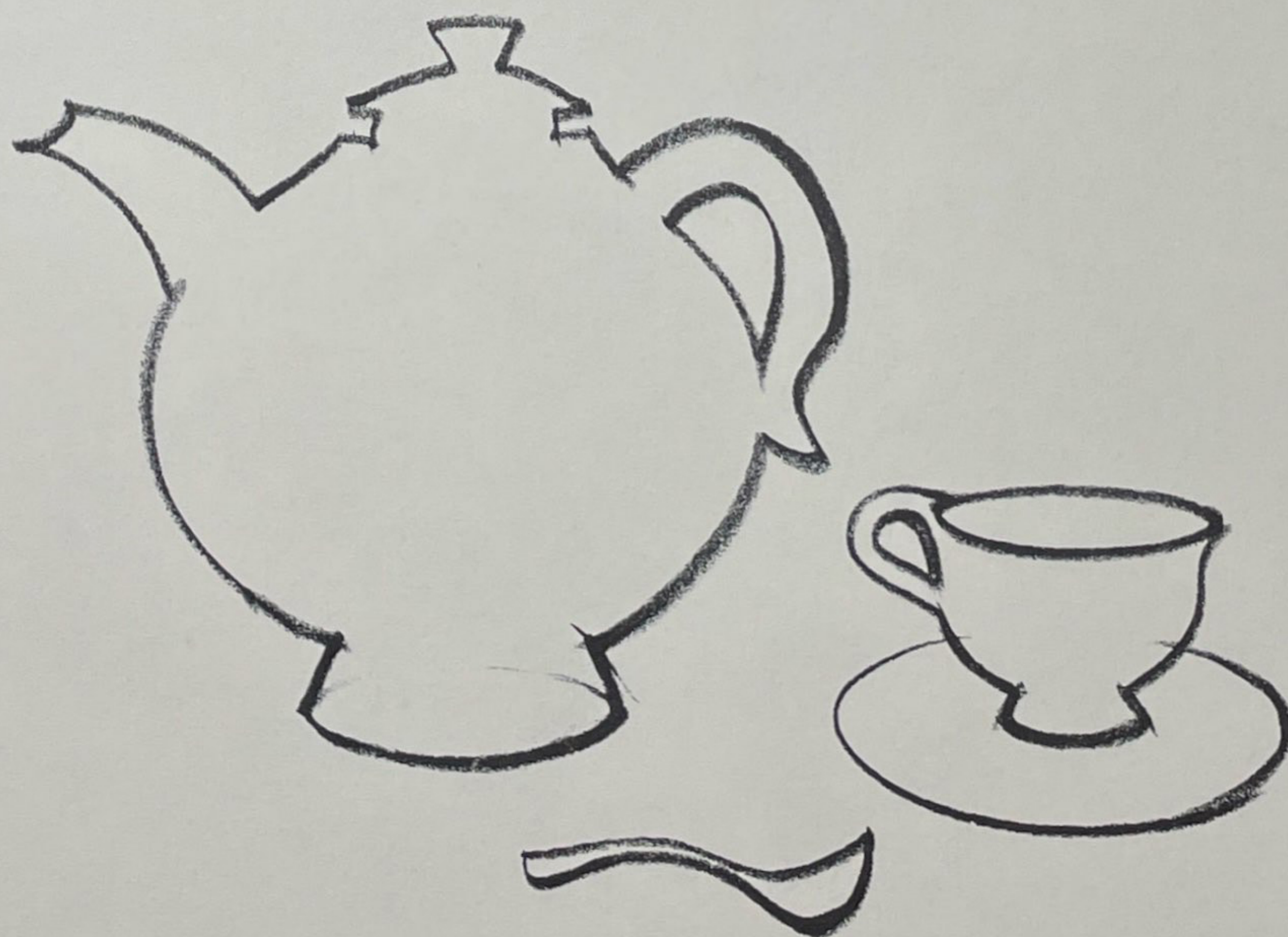
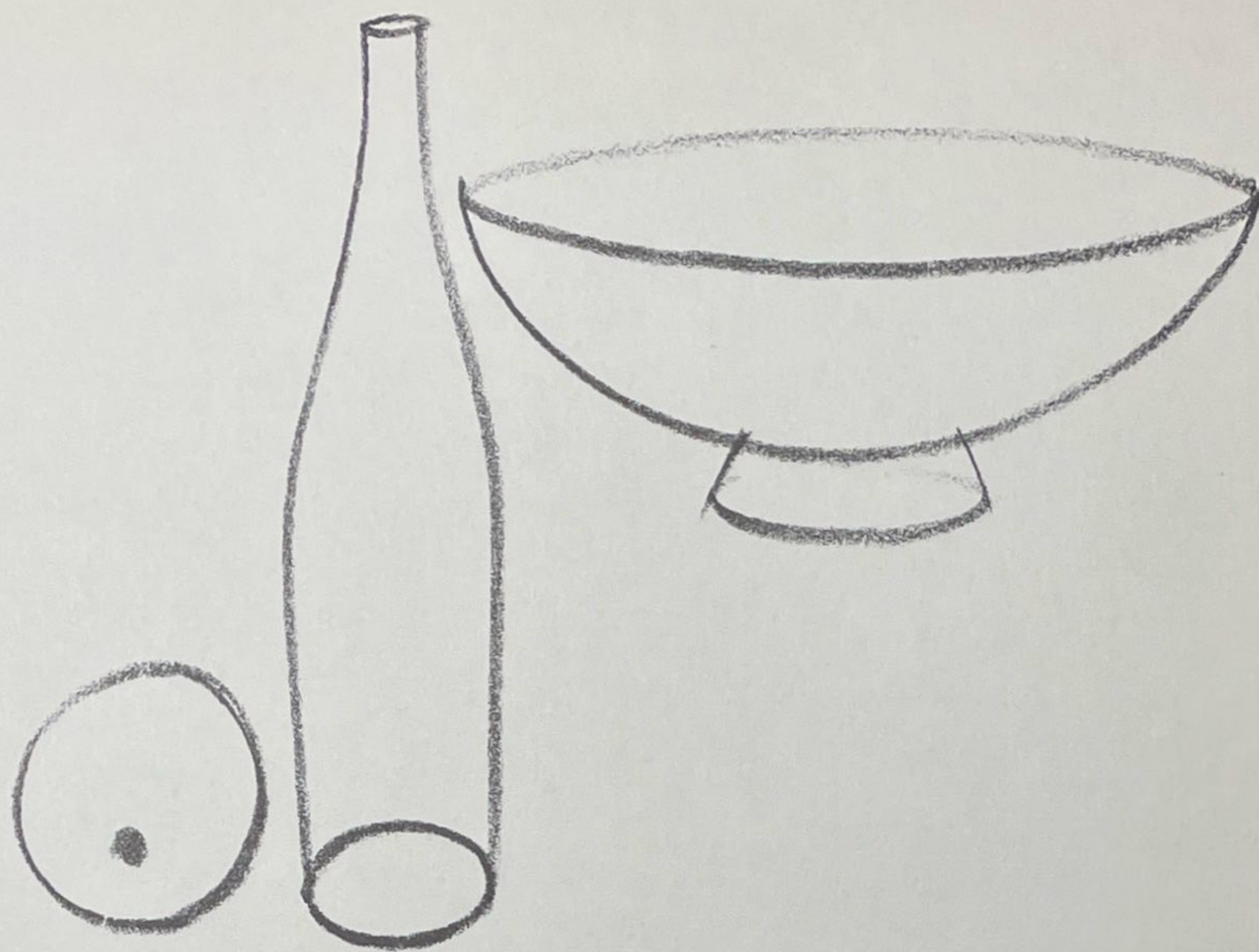


The illustration analyzed on this page was done by STEVAN DOHANOS. It was selected primarily because of its absence of excessive dramatic content. This picture depends, rather, on sound principles of design and composition to achieve its effect.

Courtesy U. S. Brewers Foundation









FAMOUS ARTISTS COURSE  
Student Work  
Lesson 9

Commercial art is functional art designed to do a specific job for a particular client. Ultimately, in most cases, the job is to help that client make money. To do this, the painting or drawing must attract as many roving eyes as possible, concentrate attention on the message to be put over, and move the prospect to take definite action.

Obviously, successful commercial pictures don't just "happen." A good deal of skill and craft are involved. The client and artist decide in advance exactly what effect they want to create. To get this effect, they must utilize every psychological and artistic trick at their command. The artist calls his painting tricks "devices" and the process of manipulating these devices to gain a deliberate effect is called composition.

A mastery of composition is the one factor, more than any other, that enables the commercial artist to make money. You may be an excellent draftsman, you may be gifted with a good deal of imagination -- but unless you know how to achieve a planned effect through composition, your efforts will be limited to rendering isolated objects and your income greatly reduced.

That is why this lesson, and the next, as well as much of the remainder of the Course, are intended to help you understand and master the subject. In previous lessons we have shown you how to create the illusion of three-dimensional forms on a flat surface and how to handle the various mediums. You have been gaining technical confidence so that you can put down your ideas easily and effectively, but never confuse drawing or rendering with composing. Drawing and rendering are skills involving eye and hand; composing is a skill governed by the mind. Composing is a process of inventing and relating shapes, forms, lines, values, textures and colors in such a way that they get across an idea as quickly, clearly and effectively as possible.

Composing is a complex problem. It demands sensitivity, imagination and taste, yet the different aspects of the problem can be examined and studied separately as has been done in this lesson. Over the centuries, certain principles of composition have become obvious, and as you work through the text, you will discover what these are. Read the lesson through again looking for these principles.

To begin with, you should understand the principles of establishing one major object or area as a center of interest. Everything in the picture must be controlled to help the observer see this center of interest immediately. Review Pages 3 through 5. In most pictures, of course, there are a number of minor objects. These must be carefully related to the center of interest, to each other, and to the picture borders so that they create a balanced and stable pattern emphasizing the most important material. The principle of overlapping plays a

very important part in picture organization. On Page 6 you will find suggestions which will help you to avoid many pitfalls in relating objects through overlapping.

The scale of objects in relation to the total picture space has much to do with the psychological effect that you have on the observer as explained on Page 7. One of the principles by which attention is centered on the major area is the principle of emphasis. Pages 7 to 9 show how lines and tones can be used to lead the eye immediately to important material. Rhythm plays a very significant role in determining the kind of impression your picture will create. Finding the right rhythms of line and shape as well as relating your various picture elements rhythmically is a problem discussed and analyzed on Pages 9 and 10.

The rest of the lesson shows how the faculty members handle compositional problems practically in creating actual commercial pictures. If you study these case histories carefully, you will gain real insight into the question of how working professional artists worry about this question of gaining maximum impact by compositional means.

We suggest that you pay particular attention to the discussion of "Mood in Composition" by Ben Stahl on Pages 18 and 19. This is quite a simple explanation of an all-important compositional device. You will find this discussion increasingly useful as you begin to work out a variety of compositional problems yourself.

#### To Study and Practice

It is impossible to give specific directions about composition because every painting is a new problem. In fact, every change you make in a composition creates new problems which must be solved on the spot. For example, if you introduce a new object or vary a shape, you may disturb a carefully established balance, or overpower the center of interest, or raise questions of value distribution, or upset the rhythm. In any case, you will almost always have to compensate for changes in one area by making changes of one sort or another in quite a different place.

One of the best ways to ferret out the solutions to such problems is by constant analysis. When you see an illustration which appeals to you, analyze it in terms of the different devices the artist may have used. Where did he put the center of interest and how did he emphasize it so that you see it immediately? What kind of shapes did he use and how did he balance and overlap them? What is the linear structure of the picture like -- what kind of rhythms are set up? Are there strong contrasts in rhythm and



shapes? What is the value range of the picture and how are these values distributed? Is there much emphasis on texture? Are the different textures held together in definite areas or does the artist use texture as a unifying device, distributing pretty much the same texture over the whole painting area? What is the scale relationship between the main objects and the total painting space? Do the objects seem important and dynamic, dominating the picture world, or are they overwhelmed and lost in the space around them? What is the over-all mood of the picture and what devices are used to achieve that mood? Quite a large sounding piece of work, but not really when you begin breaking it down. We can't overemphasize the importance of your trying it.

You can learn still more by making changes in the picture to see what happens. Trace over the picture and leave out this shape or that. Change important shapes to see what happens to rhythm and

balance. Redistribute textures. Render it with quite a different value distribution. In short, try to discover why the artist did what he did. See whether the changes you make improve or weaken the structure.

Of course, in addition to analysis, you must compose your own pictures. In the end, that is the only way to develop your own approach as an artist. Make rough sketches in the beginning, solving your basic problems before you start drawing or rendering in a serious way. Try to be curious; not too easily satisfied. Try a dozen different possible solutions to the immediate problem, even if you finally decide that your first inspiration was best. Remember -- composing is not drawing. Composing is thinking. Learn to think on paper. A good composition will save you time in the end. The picture will practically draw itself and the more simply you present it, the more forceful and effective it is likely to be.

#### THE ASSIGNMENTS YOU ARE TO SEND IN FOR CRITICISM

We mentioned earlier on the sheet that composing is a skill governed by the mind. The assignments we will ask of you will deal with tuning up your thinking. If you can reach a point where you are able to generalize a shape without detailed concern, and where you can move it around, think of what its form does to the picture space and to the other general forms, you can easily go on to the practice of actual form representation. Bear with these seemingly simple exercises then, for they are the road into new experience, new picture savvy.

It is very important at the composing stage that whatever you put down goes down as quickly and easily as possible, so that your mind is left free to solve the picture problems in proper sequence. Try then to develop the ability to reduce each form to its simplest shape while thinking of its finished effect on the picture. This is really the dual purpose of composing -- that of taking care of the preliminary planning and simultaneously thinking of the finished product.

ASSIGNMENT 1 - Mark out two 4 x 5-inch rectangles on a sheet of paper measuring 11 x 14 inches. Do this again on a second sheet, but fill the last two areas with a flat opaque grey. Be sure that this is a darker grey than the tone you use on the bottle and teacup described below.

There are two groups of still life objects printed on the attached white sheet. First, trace them off onto a sheet of drawing paper and set

it aside for the moment. Now, cut out the objects printed on the original sheet -- cut about a 1/16-inch outside the lines so that the line remains visible. Within the 4 x 5-inch rectangles on the first sheet you marked out, arrange and rearrange these forms in terms of line, until you achieve what you feel is a satisfactory composition of each. Glue the shapes lightly into position and move on to the next part of the assignment.

You may find that some of these objects will not fit comfortably within the picture space. This will mean that you must allow the border to cut off a part of them. Be sure that you plan this cropping so that both the shapes of the objects and the background areas are interesting and effective.

Now take the sheet on which you traced the two groups of shapes and paint the shapes with simple flat opaque tones as follows:

the bottle -- light grey  
the apple -- black  
the bowl -- leave this white

the cup and saucer -- light grey  
the teapot -- black  
the spoon -- leave this white

Cut the shapes out and this time arrange them in the toned rectangles, in terms of shape and value. Glue them when you have established your composition.

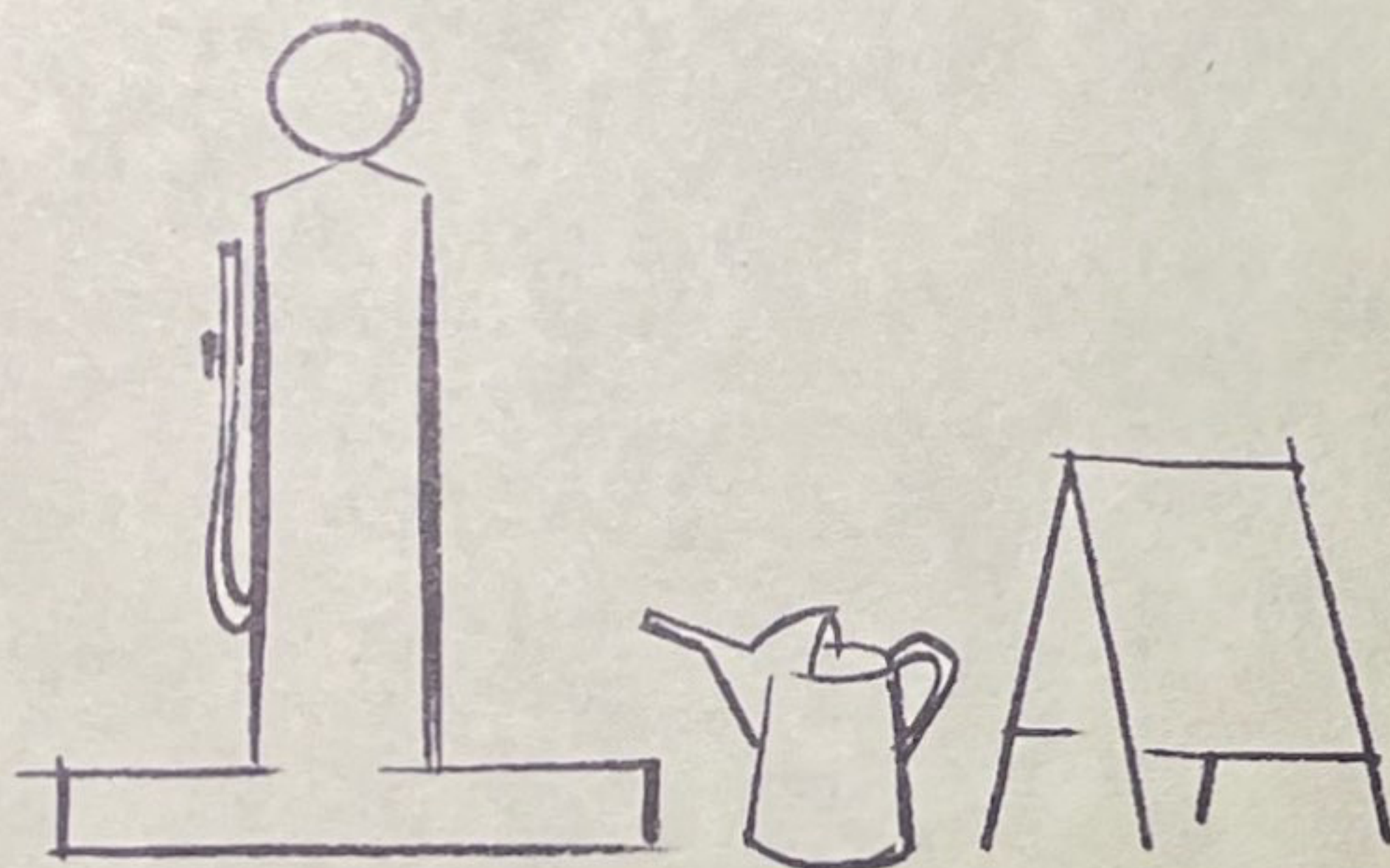
See Page 3



This assignment is much more difficult than it may appear at first glance. You are working with objects of different size, shape and value. Remember that they must be related to the picture borders as well as to each other. The negative shapes between them should form interesting patterns that strengthen the relationship of the objects without attracting undue attention or leading the eye out of the picture. Don't be afraid to move them around plenty. We think you will be quite amazed at the feeling you will have for balance and distribution unfettered by the necessity of drawing as you think -- as you compose. Always remember the two are synonymous.

Mark the sheet with the line compositions ASSIGNMENT 1-A, and the sheet with the tone compositions ASSIGNMENT 1-B.

### ASSIGNMENT 2.



Compose three forms similar to those shown above -- a gas pump, a gas station watering can and a typical gas station V-type sign joined at the top and standing on the gas pump "island." This sketch shows the general shapes of these objects. Draw your own pump, watering can and sign large enough to compose effectively within a 9 x 11-inch area on

a sheet of paper or illustration board 11 x 14 inches in size. Try to arrange these three objects in a way suitable for an illustration in an advertisement. You might find it very helpful to work out this composition by first simply drawing the outlines of the objects, cutting them out and moving them around until you are satisfied with their relationship, just as you did with the shapes in Assignment 1.

Trace down your final pencil drawing on illustration board and render it in opaque. You have an additional consideration here, in that you will be indicating solid forms. Keep your treatment simple and, eliminate any background material, except for a tone to show up your objects effectively.

Approach this problem just as though you were doing a commercial assignment. Decide on a center of interest and arrange your objects and tonal contrasts to emphasize it. You can work from the actual objects, photographs or from similar material which you will find in almost any magazine. The source of your reference material is unimportant, but the compositional arrangement should be entirely your own. If you first consider the actual relationship of a group of such forms, then this relationship to your picture area, you will find that your concern with composing will result in a much more convincing picture.

Mark this sheet -- ASSIGNMENT 2.

IMPORTANT. Letter your name, address and student number in the lower left-hand corner of each drawing. In the lower right corner, place the Lesson Number and Assignment Number. For criticism and grading, mail ASSIGNMENTS 1-A, 1-B and 2 to:

FAMOUS ARTISTS COURSE  
Westport, Conn.

BE SURE to fill out the return shipping label and enclose it with your assignment. This helps a lot in getting your assignment back quickly.